

Rochester Institute of Technology

RIT Scholar Works

Theses

2017

Coattails & Paradise

Knhik Haefner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Haefner, Knhik, "Coattails & Paradise" (2017). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact ritscholarworks@rit.edu.

Coattails & Paradise

Knarik Haefner

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for

the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in

Film and Animation

School of Film and Animation

College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

Approved:_____

MFA Advisory Committee:

Tom Gasek, Thesis Committee Chair

Signed_____

Date_____

Brian Larson, Thesis Committee Member

Signed_____

Date_____

Mark Reisch, Thesis Committee Member

Signed_____

Date_____

North of Neutral:
The Thoughts and Process of *Coattails & Paradise*,
a Stop-motion Musical for the MFA Thesis at the
Rochester Institute of Technology

Table of Contents	
Abstract.....	4
Introduction:	
Love Letters and the Vivisection of David Foster Wallace.....	5
The Core of The Writing Meat Machine:	
The Research, Sources and Inspirations behind the Film.....	7
Chapter 2: Year of the Tiny Dark Room.	
Concept and Design Processes.....	15
Chapter 3: Alignment and Agency	
Pre-production in 4 Stages.....	22
Chapter 4: Outer-space or the Story of Making	
Production and Process.....	28
Chapter 5: A Collection of Fires and Putting Them Out	
Post-Production.....	62
What I Talk About When I Talk About Art.	
Finishing the Project.....	67
Premier Night! or My Kingdom for a Sub-woofer	
Reception and Critique.....	71
The Unbearable Burden of Progress: North of Neutral	
Conclusion.....	75
Appendix:	
List of Screenshots and Images	
Proposal	
Final Pre-production Booklet	

Abstract:

This paper is about the construction and process of the MFA animation, *Coattails & Paradise*, a Stop-Motion animated musical about bodies and choices. This film was made over the final year of my MFA at the Rochester Institute of Technology, where I had the opportunity to make use of space, equipment and resources to make an animated film.

Coattails & Paradise is a film about bodies and souls and the choices we make that impact the experiences we have with our bodies and minds. The project was created as a musical where the sung plot points follow the main character, Magdalene, along her memories about her body and her mind. The film takes on a biblical allegory, returning to the first place where bodies and minds became unified in the human creatures we are today: the Garden of Eden.

The film is a triumph of separate elements, with complete silicone puppets fabricated from 3D printing, a theatrical space of flat prop and set elements, a stage which transitions along with the plot, and a story that takes a specific character along her journey about her feelings of detachment between body and mind. The musical nature of the piece helps break down the story beats song by song. The result is a film about heavily considered bodies. Stop-motion was the natural medium for this film about bodies animated without minds and minds remembering the textile nature of their lives. The theatrical setting serves as a reminder that this is a film and fiction: the set and the space are as constructed by the actors as they are for the film.

Coattails & Paradise is a film about bodies and happiness, about self image and representation. Framed as a musical, it takes beats from the style of musical theater, with key parts of establishing dialogue, character introduction and development and resolution defined by separate songs within the narrative. In dealing with bodies and choice and happiness, *Coattails & Paradise* uses biblical themes in the musical narrative, as the main character, Magdalene, journeys back to the garden of Eden while she is on a path of self discovery.

Introduction:

Love Letters and the Vivisection of David Foster Wallace

In one of the earliest conversations about my thesis, I was talking to one of my oldest friends about film. Something that has become more and more important in my own making and evaluation of art and film is the consideration of what appears on screen and how I, a Straight White Male could and should necessarily appear as film maker. A thousand thousand stories have been tailor-made to my experience and a thousand films this year will yet again try to amplify “how hard it is to be a white boy with a father and/ or a job and/ or a lover and/ or without said father or job or lover.” When I think about myself as an artist and the beginning the process of my MFA, I find, for a number of reasons, that making more of these films, about my specific lived experience, is not art I want to make. The answer, we

continually arrive upon seems to be that someone like myself needs intrinsically to work *on* a project while working to give voices to those around me.

“Yes, but,” I replied, “I have to make a film.”

“Yes, but,” They said, “You have to make a film.”

This is an important framing reference to all of the choices I will go on to make over the next year of a thesis MFA in Animation. That I am intrinsically *not* interested in forging my own narrative, or artistic statement. That, at every given turn about the stories we tell, I (or anyone) *must* seriously consider why the choices we make have arrived at the film created and, given the option to tell literally any story (as in animation), why do we choose to tell the stories we create? These choices matter. They continue to matter at every turn and continue to be reflected on the world they impact.

Once I confront these choices, the next important detail of my work on *Coattails & Paradise* is more about how I consider art and film from an author's point of view. A work is a series of bones to me. It can be dressed up, or re-arranged, or switched but there are rules about how we create that are studied, and ignoring or surpassing those understandings or rules is not only risky but irresponsible as someone looking to earn a Masters of Fine Art. While I am not alone in this interpretation, I do not think that this is essential for everyone undertaking this sort of project, nor do I believe that everyone is held to this level. As the above, this is something I personally consider important on an intrinsic level. A film about myself would have been clumsy and irresponsible. A film that does not consider the pieces

would have been unworthy, by my own standards, to be considered an MFA.

When I consider *Coattails & Paradise* after the fact, after all the hours I put in, after all the choices made for the sake of time and the sake of realistic expectations, after all the money spent and after all the conversations with people attached and otherwise to the project, I consider the project incredibly successful. What I set out to do, what I wanted to create and the style and settings of things that were critically important to me: this film demonstrates that. In a perhaps direct way, this film about anyone but myself became something very close to me. Something vast and important while also careful and delicate in places that I felt like needed the most breath. This film was and is a success in my eyes and whatever happens to it or me beyond it, it will remain in many ways an artifact of those things that *do* indirectly define me.

The Core of The Writing Meat Machine:

The Research, Sources and Inspirations behind the Film

I *do* want to be direct about the pieces here. The pieces are important. *Coattails & Paradise* is a film about pieces. It is a film, I hope, most centrally that is attempting to answer a question about pieces. A film about what we do as humans and what we do that makes us humans. *Coattails & Paradise* set out to be a project that would address a specific kind of body dis-morphia: a separation between spirit and body: a dual identity as animal – which eats and ages and lusts and dies – and of mind - a soul which seems to contain and not contain the self.

The soul or spirit is an identity which above all else seems capable of taking a night binge-drinking, a disappointing sexual encounter, an imperfect prom night or a bad habit and separating those moments from that core self and to, in that moment, say, "No, that's not the real me."

Everything else in this thesis project, from biblical reference, to medium, to tactics, to song was secondary to that, or hopefully, in direct assistance to that first concept. *Coattails & Paradise* is a film about the separation between body and mind. It is a film in stop-motion animation where literal artifacts are given life through the illusion of motion. It is about the Garden of Eden, a single great event where that schism occurs. It is a musical, where actors on a stage pause and use emotional beat to sing out with their voices what the mind feels. At its outset, this is a film wherein I set out to explore this question of how my own body feels in a great many ways distant from my mind.

In the shadow of my peers and friends from my undergraduate art experience, I considered myself something of a novice, barely able to keep up with the language or content of discourse in our daily exposure to art. I spent a lot of time in the religious studies department, where I also felt green behind the ears but at least was (tangentially) exposed to more heady contemporary theory. This is important because I **felt** that at RIT my role was reversed. In the company of incredibly skilled drafts-people, camera and lighting technicians, and experienced computer animators and rendering specialists, I would regularly fall back on the theory I felt I could better bring to bear in my work and as such found myself more and

more interested in the process of considering a work in a very theoretical level. In setting out to address my thesis then, I did turn to a large number of sources for consideration in how I wanted to go about my project, both structurally, visually and mechanically.

The earliest version of this idea was very a different film, which probably still exists at some point in time, but these pieces still serve as an important starting point in the research and work that would in turn create the final project.

Make-Believe Museums and the King of the Moon:

In the Museum of Jurassic Technology, there is an exhibit of “Imagined Proto-visual Bible Scenes.” In the exhibit, carefully crafted miniature sets have holographic figures projected into the physical set. Each vignette illuminates a small scene from the Bible, and, while they were not animated, coming in to animate individual sets with holographic pieces was the first inspiration for this film and how I wanted to curate it. While it changed from an installation to a conventional film, elements remained: vignettes expressing points of view around an over arching story. Surely, too, the religious imagery was attractive.



Fig 1-3 Museum of Jurassic Technology; “Imagined Proto-visual Bible Scenes: No1, Discovery of the Tomb”

Structurally, and from a stop-motion perspective, I was deeply inspired by *The Eagleman Stag* by Mickey Please, another character-oriented stop-motion piece that discusses very ageless themes (the meaningfulness of time in this case) in an individual story that is both funny and poignant as it goes. In retrospect, when I compare the two, my film also hits beats that fall in almost an identical pace.

With some sense of what kind of structure I wanted, informed by the above, there remained the center of the piece: what, at the core, is my film about?

For me, as I have alluded to above, the central theme of my film had to be something that was important to me, but simultaneously something that could be expressed through a point of view very different than my own. As an author, or artist, or film-maker, I find this essential and, as it should be, the most difficult part. For me, I drew on authors who had spoken most directly to me: Kurt Vonnegut, Chuck Palahniuk, Tom Robbins and others who write about themes of separation between the physical body and the spiritual mind inside. *Slaughter House Five*, about becoming “unstuck in time,” deals with these disconnected ideas and *Fierce Invalids Home from Hot Climates* describes the central character's insides as some sort of “Ineffable white orb” while the physical body goes and behaves in whatever it was going to do outside of the control of the energy inside.

From Vonnegut's Bluebeard, “And this book is being written by a meat machine in cooperation with a machine made of metal and plastic. The plastic, incidentally, is a close relative of the gunk in Sugar Creek. And at the core of the writing meat machine is something

sacred, which is an unwavering band of light.”

Terry Gilliam's *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* has this conversation most directly and most directly impacts my film: Robin Williams as the king of the moon separates his head from his body and becomes a philosophical master of time and space. His body, a filthy, groping slob finally grabs the head in the scene and in a moment he is consumed with more physical desires: sex and food and consumption replace ideals, philosophy, and greater aspirations:



Fig 4-6 *The Adventures of Barron Munchausen* (1988), Terry Gilliam

And so, I started the treatment of my film with these parts in play. I wanted a young Mexican girl – someone very different from my life experience – to have a series of vignettes – life experiences – that would place her in opposition to these themes: that of having a mind and body in very different spaces and trying to reconcile these two states of being. She was

originally a nun. It was originally a series of isolated vignettes installed in a physical installation piece about mind and body. It originally drew on themes of the Day of the Dead, being another moment where bodies and souls are pointedly separate, and also as inspiration for the color palette of the film. In Mexico, then, I wanted another character to converse with my nun, and it began as Quetzalcoatl the feathered serpent, another pseudo-religious image to play with as the nun goes through her catharsis.

The actual writing of the film is where things began to change drastically. In conversations with my adviser, I moved away from installation work – I was in the department of film, and I wanted to make something that would be seen in the medium of film. I also began a process that would inform my work throughout my film: working with people who could provide more information about what was most important for me in the film and, importantly, provide the point of view that I could not. I owe a lot to the people who would give me feedback on my process and these nine or so “editors” informed a lot of what I wanted to include in my project. They were all specifically people who did not identify as male and each came from very diverse backgrounds: outside and inside of vocabularies on art and film, more or less fluent in the themes I had described, or just someone to say no to ideas I was too fixated on. This was actually a lot of fun. Through this process I was avoiding the problem of the camel: a metaphor for when a committee of people work to design something (in this idea, they design a horse) and once everyone's input is accounted for and considered, they do not have the graceful racehorse, but instead have a beast with all these extra add-ons

which becomes far less graceful in practice – a camel. I worked hard not to end up with a camel: a film written by committee, but I also had to know when I was stepping too far outside of the bounds that I was fluent in. Paramount to this is a fear that I could not write a female perspective with as much breadth as I could for a male: the details were what I specifically took a lot of feedback on.

Thus, the over-all treatment that would most closely become this film was outlined over the summer before the production truly began. The film would open in an intimate setting – some place where the main character would still be closest to her essential self and, through a series of memories and questions, she would begin to ask where this separation of mind and body began, and then reconcile it within herself and find a solution: that, like so much, she needs both to enjoy either. I quietly wanted a happy ending to the film and liked this real, true resolution a lot.

I selected scenes that would define both of these themes: an idea of a “perfect Saturday night” where her body was in an ideal image of how she should have liked it, foiled by the reverse, a Wednesday morning where that perfect image seems impossibly far away and a place where the physical and mental overlap or blend. I wanted a moment of seeing her mind or spirit free from the “cage” of her body and a scene where her body would be free from the weight and expectations carried by the mind – some place essential and wild and free. I kept a few themes away from these selections because of what was important to myself and through feedback from my story editors: I never drew a direct connection between

frustrations with having a body and eating. I wanted to deal with some light body-image issues, indirectly, but I knew I wanted to avoid any sort of eating-disorder connotation, especially with a female lead. I had also originally used more graphic imagery of sex and menstruation which I backed off because it wasn't essential to the theme and had too much male-gaze shock implied.

It was during this process that the biblical story of Eden was slowly folded more and more closely into the film. It fit the theme pretty well: the paradise of prehistory, a time when humans were bodies unaware of greater ideals of bodily shame, and the apple as a direct mythical event where that moment and the humans in it changed: discovery of knowledge and the ideals attached to having a mind of full agency. I began to distance the film more and more from the day of the dead images. It was source of a lot of preexisting imagery in other stop-motion films and didn't serve my purposes so directly. These changes lead to a larger change to the secondary character, Quetzalcoatl, as well.

Originally just a sounding board for the main character, I made a few decisions around this second character that greatly impacted the final result. Immediately I was critiqued on the agency of that character. It began as a cypher for me, the author, to interrogate my main character and surely it read that way. In addition, if it were masculine, it would be a direct message of man interrogating woman, which I strongly resisted. By discarding the Day of the Dead for a more heavily biblical influenced image, Quetzalcoatl became Coattails: the feathered serpent became biblical serpent and took root as a more antagonistic character. If

Eden was paradise, Coattails needed to be the one to tempt the main character to the resolution: that a union of mind and body is essential and a full human experience cannot have one without the other, a reversal on the original sin, the idea that this original act was what first made us human and whole.

Thus I found the title of my piece before the details were complete: *Coattails & Paradise*. A film about the intersection of minds and bodies set with those themes paramount in symbols: Coattails, the serpent tempting the woman to eat the apple of knowledge and gain the spiritual parts of her mind she treasured by naturally turning away from the Eden where human were still primal beasts – Paradise.

Oh, there was one other thing too. Somewhere over this course I decided that I wanted to make the entire piece, which has originally been a silent art installation, into a musical, but we'll get there.

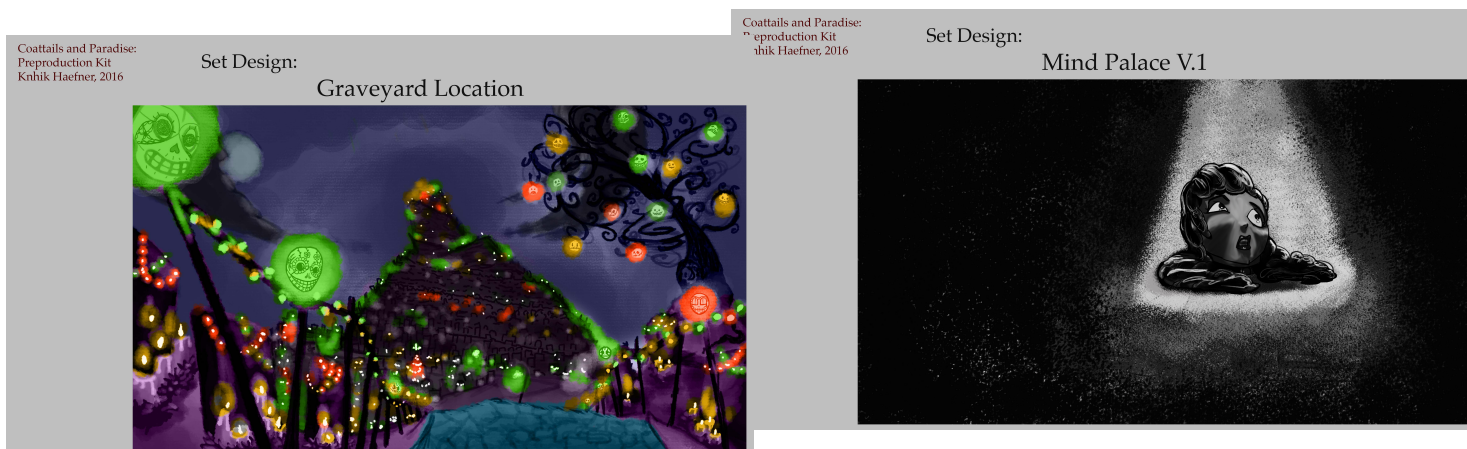
Chapter 2: Year of the Tiny Dark Room.

Concept and Design Processes

Coattails & Paradise is a thesis film in stop-motion with three acts. It sets up the central question to the protagonist: Why does she feel more content in her mind, as an imagined self, rather than in her corporeal body? It flows into three vignettes that play on that central question: At her Quinceanera where she knew she was supposed to look her best and failed; in the bathroom mirror where she confronts her physical body at her worst; and in a moment

of intimacy, where her body and head become interchangeably fluid, she confronts her real issue: could she exist without a mind, in a pure, animalistic body, or could she be happy in the reverse, to give up her body as a pure mind. In the film, I resolved this issue by returning to each of these three scenes and realizing that the connection between mind and body is essential. The ability to have this quandary is to have lived experiences and that, though at times it is appealing to exclude the corporeal or spiritual, both are required. The main character realizes this and is finally spiritually and physically whole.

The additional part of this, which was admittedly a little bit of reverse engineering, is that I also think an important part of a piece to be considered is medium. A goal of this project was to make a film that was *improved* by being in stop-motion, not simply a by-product of. I wanted to make a project that used the physicality of puppets and animation to also express the disconnect between the corporeal bodies and the spirits within.



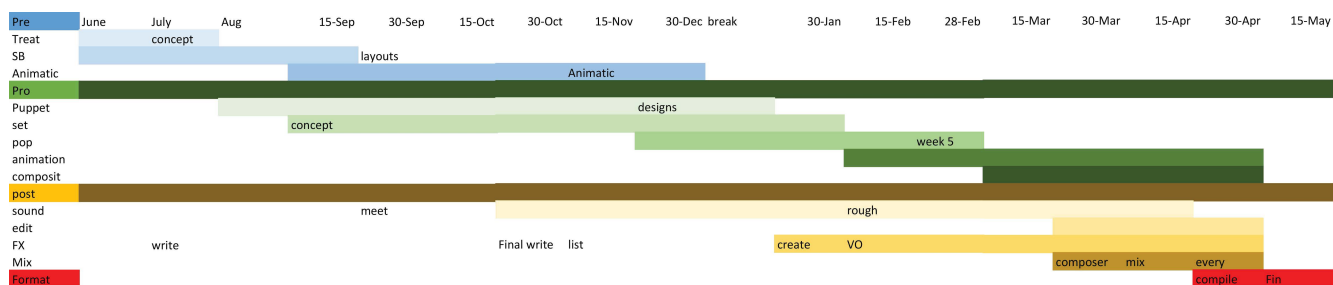
The project was approved with a treatment that had as many steps as above, but would continue to have a lot of images I would eventually expel for one reason or another. Over the summer before production began, a number of treatments and concept designs were made:



Fig 7-9 Concept Art and Mood Boards

In addition, the original budget and time line for my film is as follows:

BUDGET										
Title:	Producer:	Director:								
Days Preproduction			Minutes Running Time							
Days Shooting			:1 Shooting Ratio							
Account #	Quantity	Fee	Subtotal	Acct. Total						
100 Story										
Story and Script	1	0	0	0						
200 Talent										
Producer	1 IK									
Director	1 IK									
Lead Actors	3	50	150	150						
Narrator	1	200	200	350						
Extras										
300 Production Personnel										
Camera Operator	1	100	100	450						
Makeup/Prosthetics Artist	1 IK									
Production Assistant	1	100	100	550						
Still Photographer	1 IK									
Sound Recordist	1 IK									
400 Travel and Locations										
Cast and Crew meals	na	NA								
Location Fees	1 IK									
Petty Cash	na	NA								
Equipment Cartage	1 IK									
Auto Mileage	1 IK									
Miscellaneous Expense	1 IK									
500 Production Equipment										
Camera and Support	3 IK									
Lighting	3 IK									
Grip	NA	Na								
Sound Package	1 IK									
Special Effects	3 IK									
600 Art Direction										
Props	Minor CU	200	200	750						
Set Dressing	3 Sets	800	2400	3150						
Makeup Supplies	NA	IK								
Costumes	Puppets	800	2400	5550						
900 Sound and Music										
Composer	1	300	300	5850						
Recording Session	3 IK									
Music Rights	NA	NA								
Audio Stock	1 IK									
Sound Effects	1 IK									
					Sound Mix	1	150	150	6000	
					1000 Titles and Opticals					
					Art Work Cards	1 IK			1100 Editing and Finishing	
					Artwork	IK				
					Editor	1 IK			1200 Office	
					Editing Supplies	1 IK				
					Effects	3	200	200	6200	
					Release Prints	1 IK			1300 Contingency	
					Shipping	3	200	200		
					Duplication	NA			15%	
					Postage	NA				
					Office Supplies	3	200	200	6600	
					Contingency				990	
									Total	7590



I would actually stay very close to both my timeline and budget, especially at the beginning and end of the project but a number of the individual details changed pretty drastically.

As the summer went to close, then, a few important details changed.

I dropped the day of the dead. While the main character, Magdalene, would remain Mexican/ of Hispanic origin/ Lantinx, I wanted to resist comparisons to other stop-motion projects which had heavily featured skeletons and dead imagery.

The second character also grew substantially. As above, I had a lot ideas for what I originally created the character to serve as, but as the treatment changed, this character grew in agency and details. The result was a character who would be specifically non-gendered. I didn't want to have a male figure interrogating the female, but I wanted something very different to stand out from the more realistic character of Magdalene. I was very happy with the result of the character design, and it helped fit the character into the role that it would have to play: a serpent and a trickster that would press the main character to continue her journey. It is also one of the designs I am most happy with.

Along this process, I had been keeping in mind a few other pieces of the production. To begin, I signed Vicky Yepes as my sound designer and mixer. Vicky had a lot of points I was happy to have her on board for: she has a great record of sound design, a consummate practice in her work, she had also worked on *Bank Heist: The Musical*, a previous RIT musical, and could sing which would be helpful in mixing the sound for my film. Which brings me to the largest change I would enact in my film: the musical element.

As early as one of the first ideas I had proposed for my thesis was a musical, or at least, a classic “Disney Villain song.” Animation has a long history of musicals and musical elements in the medium. For me, there was a series of connections I made that pushed me along the path. First of all, I had the opportunity to see a musical by Kyle Acheson in New York City with the *Thicket and Thistle* theater company and made his connection after his show. I had planned on having a composer in my film the entire time and a few of my prior films had included a heavy consideration for the sound and it was an element of my film I had planned on giving a lot of attention to. The opportunity to work with someone outside of the usual Rochester connections was something I jumped on. Moreover, Kyle was a musical writer and took naturally to composing for my film and being able write the lyrics I would need to develop for this to work. With these opportunities I wanted to give a go at making the film into a musical. I felt like I had an opportunity fall into my lap and based on some of my other ideas it seems like it was too good to pass up.

When I consider this addition to the piece it seemed to fit in well. I was moving away

from the day of the dead and getting to push into a theatrical space would be another guide and thematic flavor to add to. I would need some voice actresses who could sing, but the writing was possible. The musical theater elements incorporated themselves into the set and design as well. The film became something more rooted into post-modern theater, with sets changing and characters acting on a stage, but maintaining some impossible elements that still kept the film squarely requiring animation as it went.

Through my chain of editors I was in touch with Kemiando Cutino, a theater actress from my undergraduate years and she put me in touch with voice actresses who could sing. Kemi is Ugandan and knows far more actresses of color so she could put me in touch with Nemna Ceesay. I had three recommendations, but Nemuna could sing and had a deep earthy voice that would be in line with the character of Magdalene, and distinctive enough, in my opinion, from what I had in mind for the other character.

Initially I had also cast a second voice actress from my undergraduate, Jahnvi Alyssa, though after a few of her takes were insufficient, I replaced her with Vicky Yepes, my sound director. I knew Vicky could sing when I recruited her, and she was a natural back-up. Even better, as a native Colombian, Vicky had an accent that reflected some of the roots of the film, being set in Latin America, with scenes in a Quinceanera.

As for the process of writing the now-musical piece, I arrived at a first stage of the story-board. A detail here was that while I would be directing scenes, and selecting lyrical elements or lines that were particularly important, Kyle Acheson would be writing the actual

lyrics and songs. I had worked with composers before, though this was a very different experience. Kyle was not a film composer (coming from theater) and therefore we had to make a lot of compromises, most of which was Kyle would tend to write long. The original draft of the story-board-to-song process resulted in a 12 minute film, which was far longer than I had time or interest in making. We workshoped over and over, eventually cutting about 2 ½ songs from the final film till we had a result just under 7 min without credits. Kyle did do an excellent job of taking what I wanted and applying it to the music. It was not purely too much, it was that, even as Kyle took critique really well, the pace of the musical elements meant that it got long. It was very much an exchange I enjoyed, however, because I knew that the music was an important part and more so if the piece was to be sung throughout.

In retrospect, this is one of the pieces of the film that I still consider most effective. We wrote a musical, after all, with nearly 7 distinct songs that each serve the roles of the emotional beat well, both lyrically and tonally. With these pieces finally in place I moved on to true pre-production.

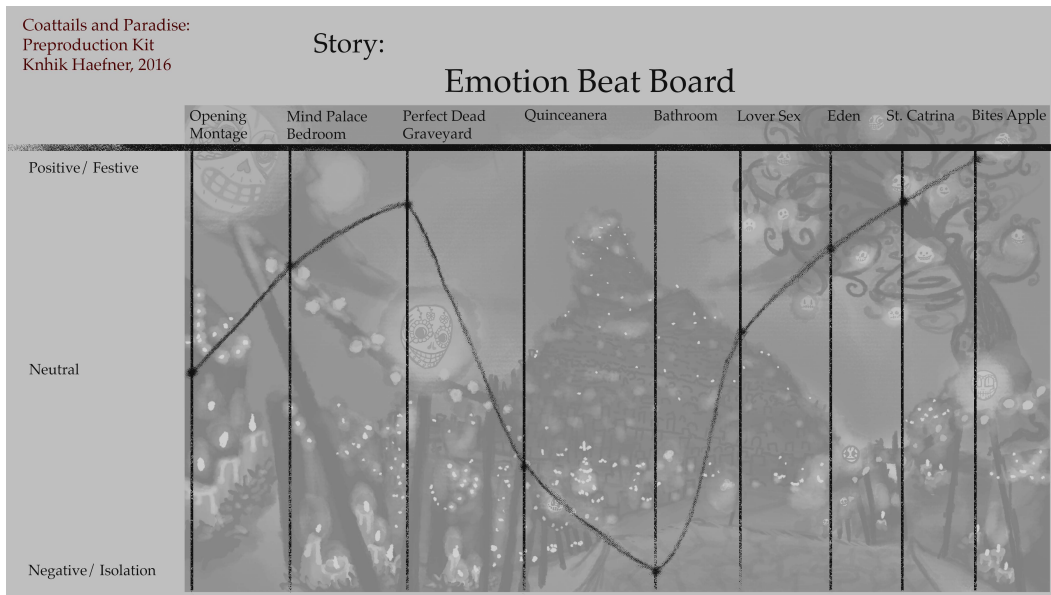


Fig 10 – Story Beat-board

Chapter 3: Alignment and Agency

Pre-production in 4 Stages

I really enjoyed the story-boarding process. I had become accustomed to my characters in their design and I knew that to really have a fun film, I would want to push the limits of I could imagine stop-motion being able to do. I still used the emotional beat arc I had created, and kept my 3 vignettes, which became 5 sets, in mind.

I pushed what I could design in stop-motion and I wanted a focus on the sets during the transitions and the characters during the scenes, especially in a few songs where I really wanted the singing and choreography to take precedent. These matured as I went from board to animatic because I could set Kyle's music in (in demo form) and then fill in the rest of the scene.

Of note, my early boards still had a male character in several parts and it opens with a

sex scene. I also hadn't fully decided on the set construction and so the sets are a little exploratory. As I made changes and left out bits, it would all get smaller

See Story-board in the Appendix for more visuals and information

Not a lot of this changed in the first draft of the animatic. The most dramatic was that as I got more filler music from Kyle I would adjust timing or add choreography to better fit the songs.

Admittedly, I was very happy with this first film. It focused on creative transitions; it had a lot of creative decisions, and it flowed pretty well. I do not confidently think now that I could have made the film that came from the first animatic round, nor do I think that I could confidently stand behind it with the confidence of the film I did finally create.

Nevertheless, it was with this animatic that I approached the first chance for real critique in the process: the animatic night.

Animatic night is a requirement for all undergraduate thesis projects to screen and receive critique in some of the earliest stages. It is something I highly value as a student in any position but as a graduate it was not required. I think this is too bad. The chance to receive feedback is not only critical as a filmmaker but also incredibly hard to find outside of institutionalized settings. I personally thought that this year's animatic night (which was in Week 5 of the semester) was oddly timed. The 2D work was pushed too far back for production and the 3D work could not be modeled in time. In the future I would hope for an earlier animatic night with very high expectations. Full motion, specific camera moves, sound

effects in week four regardless of medium. Every style of animation boards and needs the animatic step. Everyone should be good at doing it. For me, it was something that I had worked very hard to get to. I hope, in this paper, it becomes clear how carefully I was trying to step in each part of this film. I think that I made strong, if somewhat reckless, choices in talking about a point of view and character that was very different than my lived experience, and I wanted to make sure that the failings of the film were ones I selected and was in control over. It was for this reason that I used a committee of editors, and why I was so interested in critique in animatic and story-board stages. If this film became a camel, well, I decided early that I would rather have a camel than a horse running in wrong direction.

This is all to say, in so much, that I really took a lot of critique in the animatic stage. This was a first chance for people who were not me and my advisers to see what my content involved and what it means. It was a pretty brutal critique, but I think that choices made were for the best.

The real loss from the animatic night was the more sexuality direct imagery, and while I think I would have like to keep some of it for the thrill factor, I also felt like it was fine to exclude if it meant that the piece would not be taken too insensitively. This would be one of the final exchanges in this conversation that I hope is clear about how my film functions: the point of view I take, intrinsically, is tired and overplayed in media (cis White Male) but to do otherwise is difficult because talking outside of lived experience has pitfalls in insensitivity or engaging in problematic systems inadvertently. The easy answers are twofold, in my

experience: make work that removes itself from these substantive themes, or don't make work. But I guess I had to make a film, and making a film without that substance is not work I want to stand behind in the thesis project.

All of this is a way of saying, I took the story critique I was given, especially from women, with a lot of earnestly. I wanted to make this film about things that I feel, but I didn't want to fall into a pit while having that conversation. While I think the film that came out of the animatic stages was a very different film, I also feel like it was “that”: something I could stand behind in earnestly without feeling like I had treated something unjustly. The reduced sexuality of the final film reflects the critique I received. I had originally wanted it, but I wasn't going to fight hard to be wrong.

Therefore, several distinct changes were made upon feed back after animatic night that would become the final animatic for this film:

Change in into:

I had originally opened the film during a sexual encounter, which I liked for the shock, but I think it was a little voyeuristic, and didn't communicate so much. I wanted something to pull Magdalene out of her mind palace and a sexual encounter wasn't the right way to do it. I like the solution I found a lot, with a finger cut while eating an apple.

Change in Sex scenes:

Along side that, I toned down a lot of the sexual encounters. It was put pretty directly: that having a decapitated female body in erotic situations is a very direct visual, especially when viewed indirectly of the rest of the story. It was precisely the bag of apples I didn't want to touch and so I turned the sexuality charged scenes down.

Change in agency.

I also felt that the main character was lead a little by-the-hand in the first draft of the story. I had literally written the Coattails character to serve that purpose and in the first draft it was served too well. I reworked some of the transitions to make it clear that Magdalene is the one altering the scenes and, while she is being needled by Coattails, it is still her journey to make.

Change in ending.

The post Eden scene was changed a lot. I wanted something that more directly spoke to the human and her body being something imperfect and the mind being a safe spot. Rather than have her devoured by the snake and then the Coattails skeleton, I wanted to have Magdalene be the one and I wanted her to confront the body as a human, not an antagonist.

In each of these moments, the important changes were made in how the female body was predicted on the screen: sometimes in raw visual terms (not wanting to simply depict

headless female bodies during sex) or indirectly to give the main character more control over her agency, and less of being lead hand in hand over to once scene and the next. I think that, at the end of the film, Magdalene is somewhat of a cypher – a character who serves to take the audience along the narrative, but I think she is someone who has distinct traits and memories. All of this is to say, in looking for themes to tie these loosened strings along the way, I turned again and again to drawing lines towards the biblical story of Eve. I think that, as this went on, in my own consideration of the separation of mind and body, that biblical story, or something like it, is the genesis of these themes. Humanity's search for something more often reminds us that there was or could have been something like this and then looks at how to rediscover this. These religious themes fit easily into the piece as so much of western culture is centered around the (typically Catholic) interpretation of the myth. Churches, Day of the Dead and nuns were already images I had been considering and without altering a lot of piece as it already was considered.

In any result, after all this, the changes in the animatic, the conversations with the editors, and work-shopping of the music, I moved into production.

Chapter 4: Outer-space or the Story of Making

Production and Process

Outside of the story considerations for the film, the production of the piece was an almost entirely separate beast, though both would overlap. Being in stop-motion, a few

important considerations needed to be addressed from the inception.

The piece needed to be designed with a singular look. On the offset, this would mean that it needed to address story considerations for the look, but it also needed to be do-able. When I took to the design elements of especially the sets and props I looked at a lot of theatrical elements. I wanted the film to feel like a play, and that meant that a lot of my individual elements could be (literally) flat and simple to quickly generate.

In addition, the fabrication of all these elements needed to be considered. I broke this process down into three major parts: fabrication of the puppets, which would be fully articulated silicon puppets with replaceable parts; set construction, which would be a singular, simple and reusable set to base all the action from; prop and set decoration would consist of primarily foam core theatrical sets with fabric and light installations. There would be little actual set flats, instead using the theatrical space and the lighting to define space. On my adviser's request, I also made heavy use of black in my design. This would give the project a sense of space and it would make clean-up of digital assets a little easier while also not needing to render full spacial sets for the entire piece.

With those in place, I would turn to the actual production and animating of the film. This was done with a few things in mind: Ben Strack signed on as my cinematographer, who would be helping with lighting and shot construction. The animation would be nearly entirely done by me, though I often had assistant animators to help on set. I also had access to some amazing equipment through the RIT cage and considerations about what I would need

for the upcoming shots had to be scheduled and accounted for.

Finally, post-production would be tying all these pieces together and fixing any manageable errors in the production. There were a few issues that happened in the construction of the piece, but I had a post lead, Paul Bens, who would help with post issues I ran into.

All of this was then finally assembled with Vicky's mix and polished up, however, there are far more details in each of these pieces along the process.

Design:

The story-board and animatic were essential for the design of the film. Primarily, it (as always) is simply informative into the scope of the project. For me though, each shot in the story board had to be arranged in terms of assets needed, ability to complete with the equipment I had access to, and ordered to be finished in time.

The entire production process dove-tails with the next element in the list and the design began to overlap with fabrication pretty immediately.

The Characters:

I had two characters in my film who would do most of the performance: Magdalene the main character, and Coattails the antagonistic trickster who would fill two other roles: (A.) to transform into a secondary character: the serpent and (B:) in a single shot I called for

an additional “lover” who the Coattails puppet would play.

The design of these characters was some of the most “real” in the piece. While the set backgrounds were “cartoonist” and stylized, including the crowds in the party scenes and garden of Eden, the characters were very normally proportioned, and dressed in real clothes. I wanted each of them to be expressive and distinct. To that end, I also included some of the fabrication considerations in the designs of each.

Magdalene:

I wanted to keep a more singular, solemn design to the character, with a couple of easy design choices. She has long hair which gives her some secondary motion and additional character animation, and she has a simple black dress which fit both the character, more solemn and serious, while also fitting into the theatrical design as a soloist/ single performer.

Early designs of Magdalene's face had a cross-pattern skull look. This was because I wanted to use some day-of-the-dead images while also making a character that had the easily replaceable 3D face pieces. In the end, I went with a more normal look to the character, especially to contrast the more colorful design of the second character, Coattails.

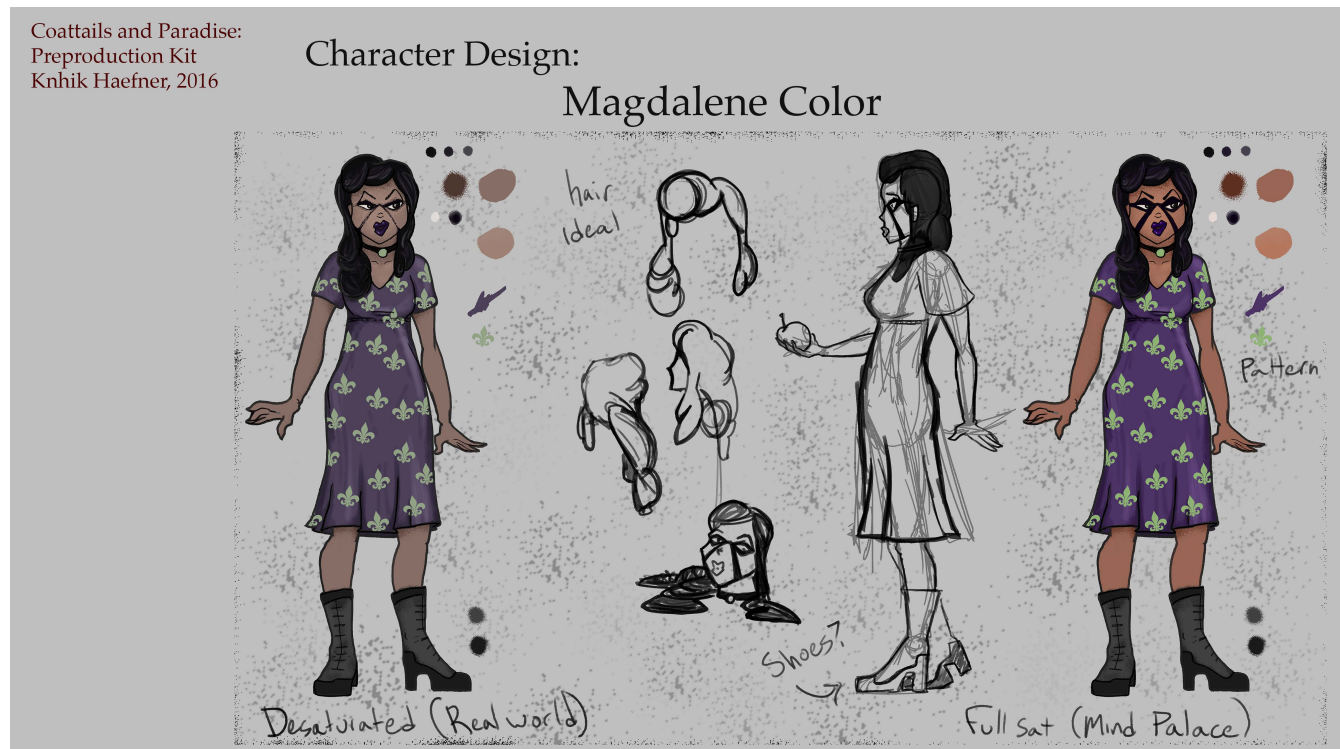


Fig 11 – Magdalene's Design Sheet

Coattails:

The Coattails character had a lot of details in its consideration. Most importantly, it had to foil Magdalene in design. They were two parts of the conversation in their inception. Another important detail early on was to avoid a pointedly male character. I was worried about the conversation becoming a male point of view interrogating a female character. The character was also inspired from Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec feathered serpent, and as the treatment turned towards a more biblical story, I wanted to maintain the connection to the serpent role, which also fit the antagonist role. What I settled on for the Coattails was

something that asked a lot of questions while also providing a more colorful contrast to the second character. The result is a character design I am very happy with.

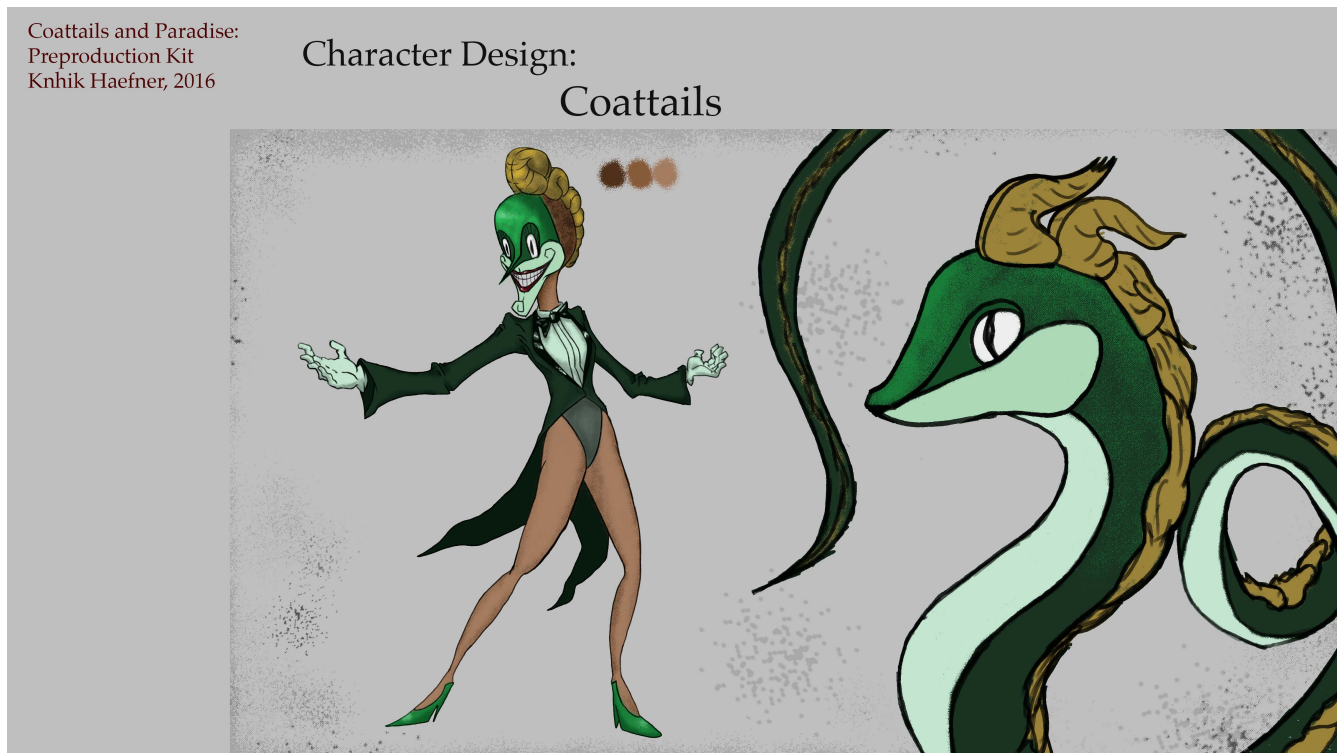


Fig 12 – Coattails' Design Sheet

It also landed in a place that was neither male nor female. I use the pronoun “it” for the character. Finally, it has connections to the snake that it transforms into in design and material but a little bit of magician as well, which especially helps the character in a theatrical setting as a trickster and a performer.

Prop Design

The set design, as other pieces of the project, had several prerequisites. It needed to be effective in fitting into the scene and the story while also being manageable to create. While I

had some assistance, without any formal agreements, I couldn't rely on anyone else. I chose to use saturated Prismacolor markers on paper attached to foam core for the majority of the decor with small additions of lights and fabric to fill scenes. The additional benefit of the foam core was that with the very small addition of armature wire, each piece could be easily attached to the base set itself. Because of the honeycombed nature of the perforated floor set, I could place objects with armature wire into the set easily and move them across it peg-hole by peg-hole.

Set Design

The set design had one major consideration for the stop-motion production; I needed a way to tie down the stop-motion puppets to support them as they were animated. In addition to that I wanted to have a theater-in-the-round which would provide for easy access all the way around the set and have a second stage for close-up work and the single scene where I would call for the actual presence of the theatrical set to be seen. The design was simple enough to fabricate but would also (inadvertently) cause the biggest problem in the animation and production process, which I only realized after the fabrication of the set.



Fig 13 – The Quinenera set with actors

Fabrication

Fabrication involved several major steps along with design. As mentioned above, there is an overlap in all the portions of this production, and thus, fabrication began while design was still being finalized, but animation would also begin before everything was constructed. The priority for fabrication was the puppets. While I had constructed a number of stop-motion puppets in the past, these would be both more important and more detailed than any I had done.

I had worked in a number of materials as a fine art undergrad and in the stop-motion projects I had finalized, but these puppets would be complete silicon puppets for a number of reasons. Foremost, these needed to last. An eight minute film would require a lot of

animation from any puppet and therefore I needed puppets that would weather the long hours and tons of use. Second, these being the only actors in a theatrical setting, the puppets also needed to stand out amongst the rest of the set. Like real actors, they would have to be more detailed and more dimensional than the rest of the parts of the work.

I decided to use the modeling program Zbrush to make the basics of my models. I had used Zbrush a number of times and very much liked the program, as well as wanting more experience with the system. Furthermore, RIT has recently gained access to liquid resin 3D printers, and I wanted to take advantage of the new technology. Initially, I actually found Zbrush to be a fantastic solution for modeling. Not needing to rig or skin the models meant that I could work quickly and effectively to create models that strongly resembled the images I had drawn.

I wanted Magdalene's proportions to be largely human without being overly cliché. While I think she still landed in a very stereotypical feminine image, I do think that she is not without individual details. She is a person in this puppet and likewise has her own flaws while also being a figure that has strong animated silhouettes. Coattails likewise would be a puppet that I would have a very different (though still feminine) body type that was likewise easy to produce. It is worth mentioning that while Zbrush has many pre-made sets of bodies, and while it is also fairly easy to find a pre-made model, all of these models were done from scratch on my own. I considered this a learning experience and something that I could easily manage on my own.

Coattails had a more demanding design, with sharp points and hard edges that Magdalene lacked and therefore, I used the coattails puppet to prototype materials with. I needed a material that kept the details that I had modeled but also could have A.) Paint applied B.) withstand the animation process and C.) have some give for the molds I would be creating for the bodies.

The basic form of the puppets would be thus:

The head, with replaceable parts would be directly 3D printed. Each mouth shape would be molded into the 3D file and printed. The body, however, would also be 3D printed but instead it would be cast in mold and have a steel armature inserted into the silicone base that I would end with. This also caused several problems in the fabrication process as I initially started with hard molds of plaster and hydro-stone. These proved too breakable for the hard wax that I was printing in and I instead moved to fiberglass under the supervision of the stop-motion fabrication teacher John Vincent.

After a little trial-and-error, the process for molding and fabrication came into several pieces:

My initial design was made in Zbrush:

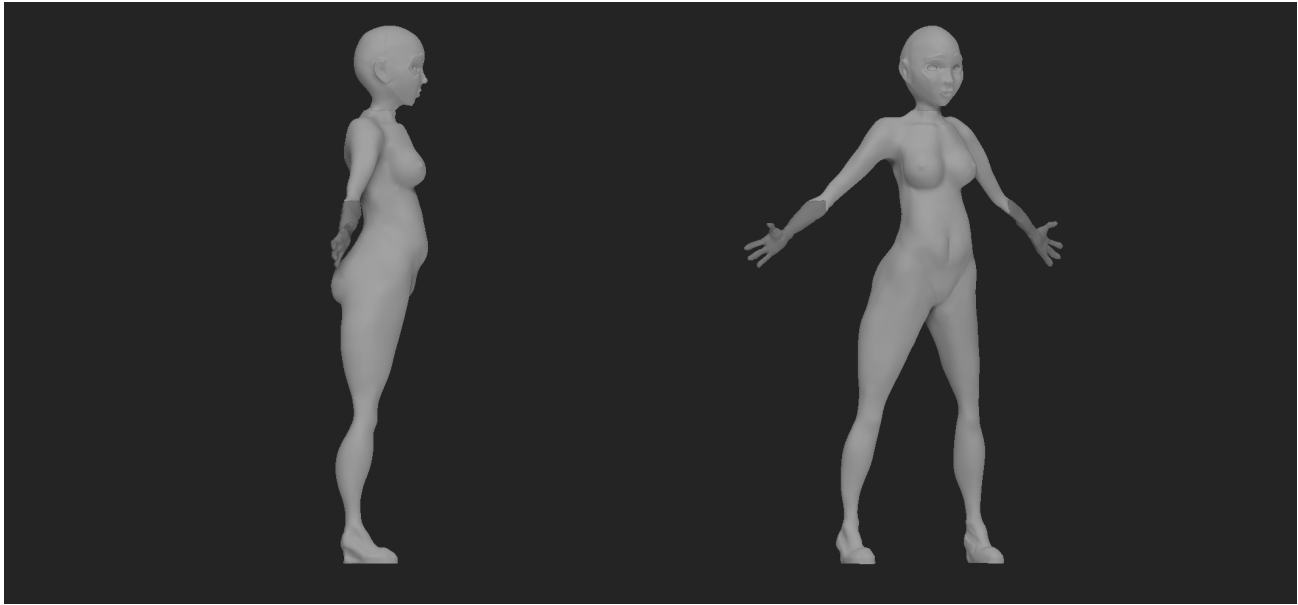


Fig 14 – Magdalene 3D body

It was then divided into pieces which would fit in the bay of the 3D printer, using a simple peg-hole registration in 3D.



Fig 15 – Magdalene 3D printed in hard resin

It was initially printed in a number of materials, with two winners: the flexible resin is what I would be printing the molds in, and the standard high-detail grey is what I would assemble for reference and send to the armature maker.



Fig 16 – 3D Materials Prototype

Without the equipment and skill to make my own armatures I would need to have them fabricated. Tom Brierton had fabricated several armatures for the RIT SOFA Cage, and could give me a great regular armature at a good price. It would be, for the three armatures, the single most expensive part of the project, nearly 25% of the entire budget, but well worth it to have durable, steel puppet armatures that will probably outlive me. Given the difficulties I would encounter animating on the surface I had, I would be happy to have the resilient and reliable puppets to assist me.

The armatures are pretty basic but still exceptionally well designed. They were made out of steel to better support the silicon casting and remain strong. Each armature was custom made to the 3D model with 18 points of articulation including high heels for both characters.



Fig 17 -

Once I had armatures and models complete, I would print again, this time in a flexible, hollow resin. This material has a lot of structure to support itself, but has just a little give to be taken out of the mold.

I cast a fiberglass mold of the flexible material:



Fig 18 – Fiberglass Mold

Fit the armature inside, injected with silicone and then I had a final silicone armature model.

It was painted with an airbrush.



Fig 19 – Painted Magdalene Puppet

I used Dragonskin Platinum silicone which would be more durable and take color nicely. I really enjoyed the Dragonskin range of products, which had colors for the silicone that could also be diluted and used in my air brush. Thus I could inject the color into the mold, and then airbrush the exact same hue over the final model for more detail.

Once I had the finished body, I would also take and clean the 3D printed face pieces. These were printed in 3D flexible resin, but solid instead of hollow for resilience. I could not find examples of paint the 3D resin before, but I found that with two base coats of primer from the airbrush I could easily apply the silicone paint and then seal.

I mapped out mouth shapes and eye brows using a blend-shape process in Zbrush and then copied all my finalized faces into separate parts. Coattails had 12 mouths and only one

brow, being in a mask. Magdalene had 18 mouths and 8 brows for a large variety of expression.

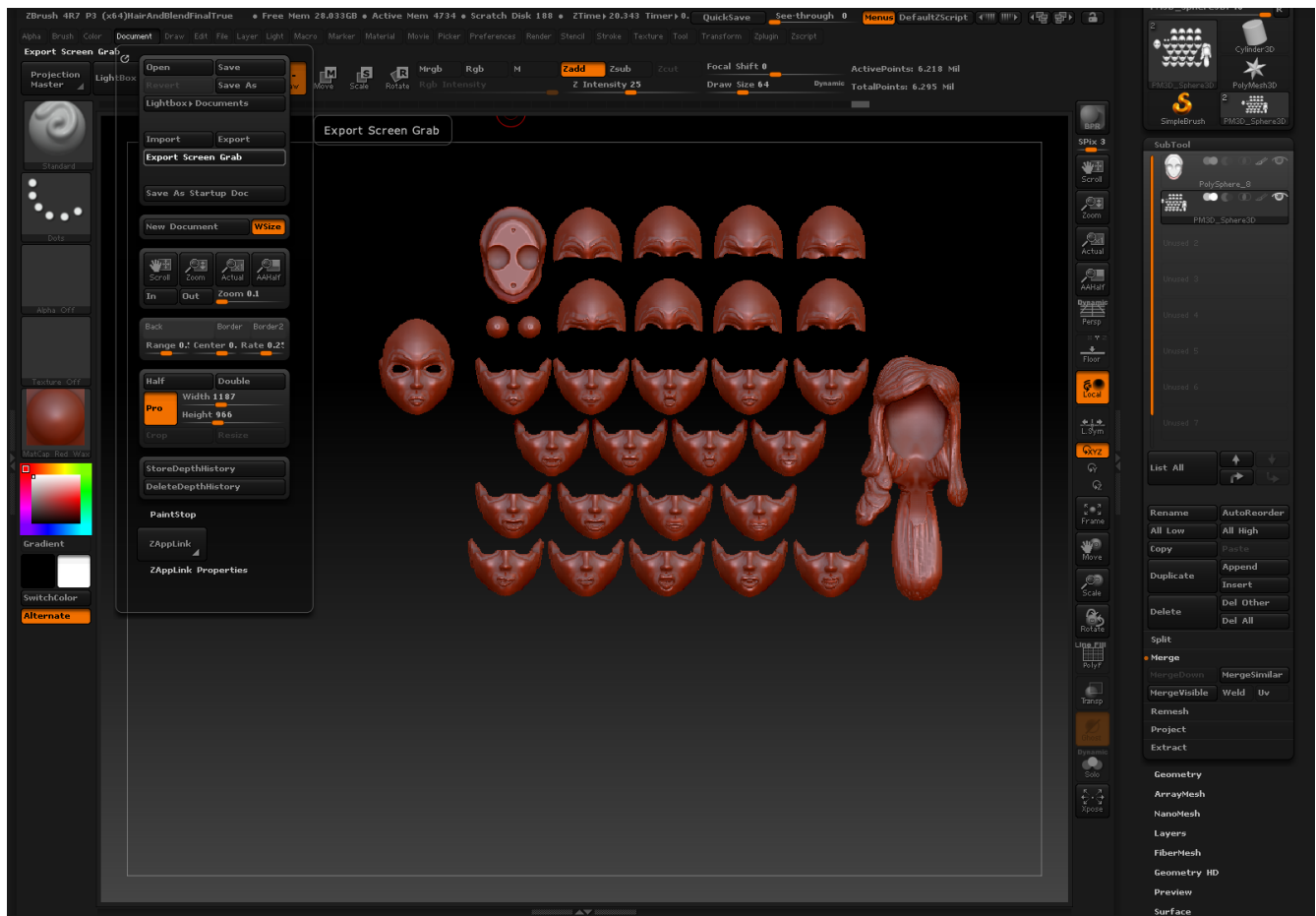


Fig 20 – Magdalene face pieces in 3D

After the printing, casting and painting was complete, I created the clothing. The clothes followed a simplistic pattern for each: a black dress for Magdelene, which was sewn by Emma Echols, and the titular tail coat for Coattails. Each piece was fabricated to have an animate-able element. For the bottom folds of the dress, a piece of black foil was glued in between the fabric. The tails of Cottails' coat had armature wire sewn in the edges.

I was incredibly happy at how close my final models resemble the design:



Fig 21, 22 – Finished puppet in final film.

Set Fabrication:

The set was built over the winter break. I designed a simple theater in the round and would make it out of pine wood. The second most expensive part of the film would be the flooring in the set. I needed something that could take the tie-downs though the film and so I decided I would use a perforated steel with honeycombed 1/8th inch holes.



Fig 23 – Set prototype

I purchased a 10' x6' sheet of steel from McNichols Construction and had a metal worker, Pat Thomlinson, cut it to size. My design called for a single 5' diameter sheet to be the top of the set, and a second 3'3" diameter sheet to be the second smaller stage. I arranged a series of pine boards around the base, larger set and attached them. I left a 3' gap for access and painted the entire thing a matte black. The paint was technically blackboard paint which would mean I could take notes or layouts on the surface in between shots.

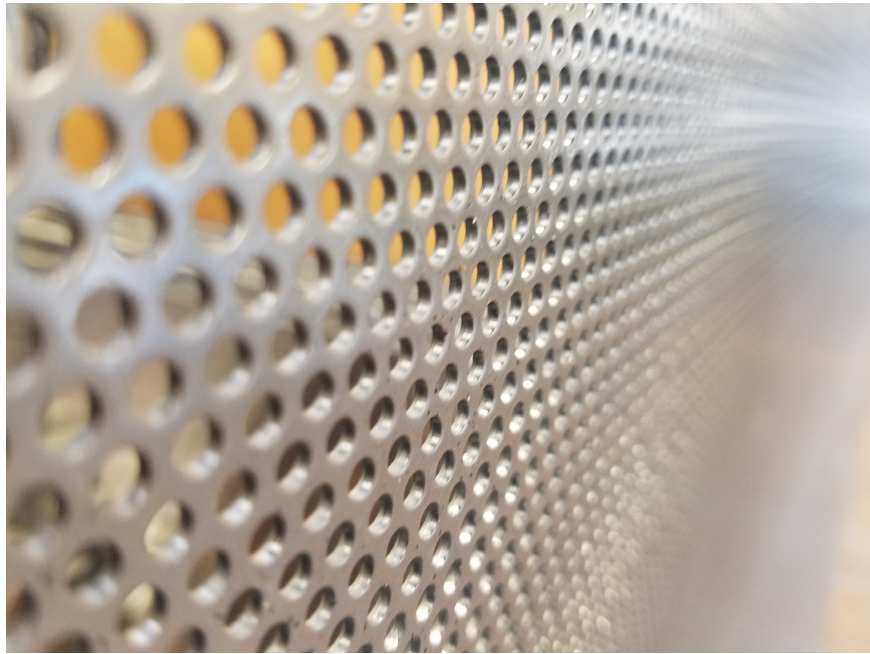


Fig 24 – Close up of metal floor with honeycomb holes

I prototyped the stage, which also went through a few drafts as I did. Early stages of the set were much larger and had several contained scenes in pieces of the set installed, but I would change this as I moved into the more theatrical themes.

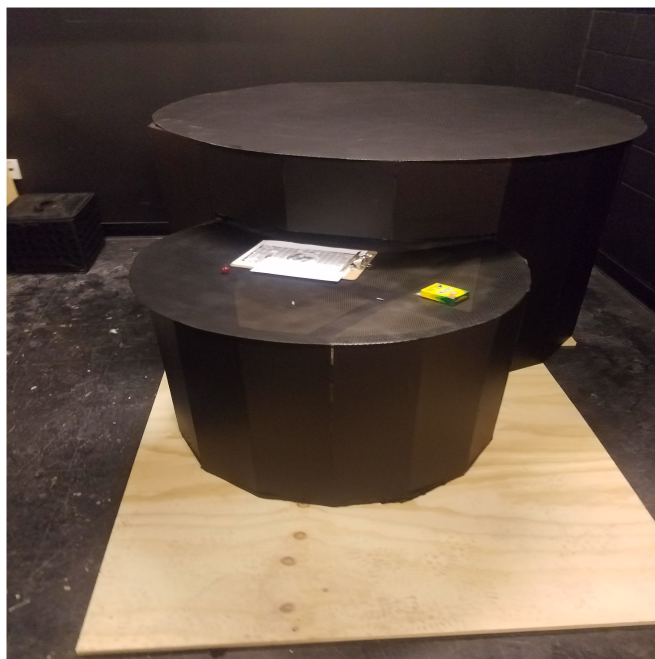


Fig 25 – Full Set Construction

The result was a durable, small set that I could easily move around and that provided a huge amount of flexibility. The large open space on top could be photographed as a large space (about 60' in the scale of the puppets) as well as simple set pieces on foam core to fall into place and allow the set of close up or establish an entire scene very quickly. The second, smaller stage also lent itself nicely to the detail work, allowing me to get up over the piece very easily. Being round also mean that I could arrange lights or set pieces as I need for shot to shot and scene without continuity errors.

As foreshadowed, though, this design also caused the largest problem in the project. The issue being that, in a single flat plane, with perforated holes, the tie-down process meant that I could not have a hand on the puppet and a hand under the floor to hold. This mean that to make a tie-down step, I would have to place the puppet foot, put the first screw into the floor, clap down the puppet, get up and under the set, and finish the tie down, get up and take the picture. This minor set issue caused my animation process to take about a half again as long. It made a two hour shoot into three, which doesn't sound as bad, but it also made a 10 hour shoot into fifteen. The animation production process would be long...

Production.

The actual animating of the piece was long, but because I came in prepared and mostly fabricated, it was a pretty easy matter to assemble every shot in the correct order to do the

best shooting. I did a simple test of my puppet in January and then turned to animation from February up until the very end. I focused on shooting full body shots of the single Magdalene character at first, moved into the hardest shots and the two character shots in the middle and left the detail pick up shoots till the end.

Each shot consisted of a set up and layout. At this stage I brought in my cinematographer, Ben Strack, to help with lighting, lenses and camera set up. Then I would layout the scene from the animation on Dragonframe and break down the x-sheet and lip sync from the animatic.

I shot almost exclusively alone with only one or two other people involved for minutes at a time. Usually these were animation assistants to help me with the tie down problem, but the truth was, with a single set, and only two characters there simply wasn't much else for someone else to cover. Ben Doran was an animation assistant who did the opening title and Luke Polito was most reliably the one who would help with tie downs.

The production and fabrication of this piece could not be possible without the access and the space that I was given. I was honored to have access to the Studio C for nearly the entire year and that space allowed me to set up, take down and animate at my own pace. This piece would not have been possible without that access. Attached to the space, I had some equipment which I would use for the animation of the piece.

To start, I had a Canon EOS 50D camera, which came equipped with a 30mm-180mm zoom lens, connected to an iMac with Dragonframe attached. I would be shooting the project

on this camera, though I would occasionally switch to a different lens as the shot required. I had access to a macro lens for close up shots lent to me by Tara Gordon. I also had 3 Arri 300 lights, 3 Mole-Richardson lights and a soft box included with the space (where the set was constructed). I made use of several other pieces of technology in particular for this project.

The motion-control rig was a piece of technology I had never used before but learned quickly. I was especially happy to have the rig interface in Dragonframe, which meant I could have complete control of the rig, from speed, to the frame that it would hit exactly where I needed it to be. This was a new experience for me, especially as I found that I would have to be composing my shot twice: in the starting and ending position. I would run into some problems as the focus range shifted with the camera, but I really got the hang of it, and in a few shots (the opening especially), I think it really adds a dimension to the film. The rig had only one motor attached to it, so all of my camera moves could only be on one axis. This was a little difficult because I often wanted to track instead of a pure pan, or add a tilt to zoom or move. I found a way around this with file types which was a strange go around but a solution that was effective, none-the-less. See the garden scene notes below.

I made use of a few other pieces of cage equipment pretty frequently. The Dedo light kit was helpful to have lights to add to the scene, especially because the small lights could be placed and lighted in a fast easy way to fit my (small scale) production. Unfortunately, I could not use the dimmer on the Dedo detail kit because of the way the lights were wired. This was too bad because I could do a lot more (focused and controlled) lighting with the Dedo kit, but

I still got a lot of use out of them.

I did also use a dimmer, which was, unlike the rig, without automatic control. This was frustrating as it often required hours of looking at a tiny needle in the dark and making sure that it moved millimeters at a time across 60 or 90 photographs. I did find a pace with it, however, and the lighting transitions in the piece are something I am very happy with.

Outside of the physical technology considerations, there were several software elements I also took into consideration. With Ben Strack working as my cinematographer and Paul Bens as my post-production lead (although post-technical supervisor would be more appropriate) and each had input into how I shot. For one, Ben would color correct the entire film digitally in Lightbox after scenes were complete. Because of this, Ben wanted me to shoot RAW images, which Dragonframe can easily do. After talking with Paul, and thinking about some of the shot details I wanted to include, I would also shoot 5k images (4800 px). This would be a data-heavy choice, as my project quickly ballooned in digital size, but it had a couple of advantages that were well worth the price. A. It allowed me to “recompose” every shot once I was assembling digitally. Small adjustments in frame, or zoom or head room were easy to accommodate, and the images could always get smaller, but this also allowed my images to be up to nearly 400% larger. If I really wanted to push into faces or action, the larger images allowed me to. The second advantage to the large images was that I could pull off a number of “digital” camera moves to add to the scene. By composing my shot with this in mind, I could animate a scene (for example) without the camera moving and then pull in with

my large images and pan across the scene. I used this a few times on its own, mostly to add small movement to a few shots that I did not shoot along side the motion-control rig, but I also used this technique with the rig. By composing the shot with with rig and allowing for a digital camera move attached, I could do a sort of tracking effect, where I have a digital move in the opposite of the physical camera move. This is actually a kind of variation of the Hitchcock effect (which I am happy to have named after me if it comes up). The “Haefner” effect allowed for a much bigger space and technology level to appear in the final production, while requiring much less production.

These two choices (RAW and 5k) did cause a few problems. One was space: my final thesis project, while writing this paper, is about 3TB of digital space spread out across my Google drive, back up hard drive, and primary drive. This does not include the 1TB each backup kept in Ben's, Paul's and Stop-motion C computers. Not only were the RAW files large, but post-color was decided to be in Targa files to preserve the 12 bit color space and to have the most editing control in Nuke where the shots would be assembled. It was a large project that would require hours to backup and move files around in, to the point where I was occasionally constantly logged into graduate lab computers. Backup would take as long as 12 hours, to the point where I once went home, ate, slept, and returned to the lab with 45 minutes left to wait to backup. Fortunately, despite all the space and waiting, I never had file or corruption issues to need my back-ups.

The other problem with the large images, especially in the animation and production

steps, was that because I would have to compose the shot for a digital move, I would have to compose the shot in a small portion of the frame, rather than the entire frame. For example, if I wanted to include a digital pan, I would need to compose the shot in a quarter of the frame, and animate a fairly small set, so that the enlarged final image would be able to move without leaving the frame.

This would mean that some of my shots required tiny detailed animated movements and the computer frame would not display the scene in detail. Fortunately Dragonframe has a small digital zoom function (in the production phase) but this was only a band-aid on the issue as the Dragonframe camera previews in low quality. I also found that in shots with a lot of zoom, or really particular detail, I could see the difference between the physical spacing of the low quality preview camera and the high quality capture within the camera. So I would sometimes find myself taking the same image several times, having to try to match the animation I was getting in the high quality images without a very good sense of placement as the “live feed” in Dragonframe is always low quality. (as a note, it would be great to imagine Dragonframe solving this problem in a later version, but the truth is that the camera can only take stills in the high quality and the software is using the digital video camera to do the previews, which is simply not capable of the quality of the high level camera.)

For all of this, I animated on 24 FPS because I wanted the practice more than anything else, but especially because it provided the most control in and out of filming. In Dragonframe I could manipulate a lot of my images to improve the animation, using hides,

holds and repeat, loop or reverse looping commands in the Dragonframe before exporting to After Effects and Nuke. I also shoot about 15-20 frames at a time, going back and polishing them up before moving along. While I considered a different frame rate, or doing more digital manipulation of the frames, the truth was that there were a lot of overlapping factors in the project. Lighting fades, scene changes, camera moves and notes from the animatic all overlapped with the biggest factor: constantly lip-syncing a singing voice through the project. Nearly every shot had one of these other considerations, and often the more simple shots were close ups, shot on a macro lens, where I wanted the detail of the face-parts to have the most detail to keep pace with the music.

I would be remiss to say that I consider myself experienced in lighting for film. I knew the basics well enough and I had a few hard rules to follow (key, fill, rim lights) but for a number of reasons lighting the piece was an intimidating prospect. I have a few handy excuses for my inexperience. Being blind in one eye, I have a hard time understanding the depth of a space, and I am pretty seriously colorblind, but the truth is that I am pretty inexperienced and not incredibly confident. Of course, I am most thankful for Ben's work in this stage and there are a number of shots where I felt like I asked for the moon and after 5 minutes of consideration, Ben provided an immediate, ideal solution. That said, there were a couple of details that gave the both of us pause in the process.

Early on in the production both of us (white men) realized we would be lighting a black female character. While the gender doesn't come into a lot of play, we did find that some

of the “rules” and equipment we were using were insufficient for our subject. Oranges regularly had to be pitched down or desaturated. Whites cast hard shadows across the darker bodies. To make it harder, the scale (about 1/5) was large for stop-motion, but still small compared to Ben's experience in live action. We found ourselves doing a lot of painting with light, especially in the color-correction step, which was, admittedly a lot of fun. Shooting on RAW meant we could really manipulate the scene in post, hiding, revealing or changing a lot of what was initially captured in camera.

In retrospect, I think we were pretty successful. The film has a golden/ red hint next to hard blacks throughout and the characters' skin is clear without being lost throughout. The Garden of Eden and the bathroom were particularly hard to light, but I think we found a line that both helps the mood and gives clear lighting.

Animation went fine. I was very happy with my personal results. Its a point I am sticky about because, as I hope this makes clear, I spent a lot of time on the consideration of the rest of the piece, but when it came to the actual animation of my animated film, it was not something I really prioritized. For one thing, my experience in my MFA had not given me a lot of exposure to animation. I did not have a single animation-focused teacher in the department teach any of my animation classes. The experiences I had and the opportunities I excelled at in my degree had been pre- and post- production related. While I had made a number of films, and I felt like I knew how to make films pretty well, I had not spent as much time (I did not have the option to spend as much time) learning the details of the actual

animation, especially in stop-motion. I also think that animation in film is beautiful, but rarely makes the film. Films are boring or they are beautiful or they are interesting but rarely (though not exclusively) is a boring film made good by the motion of the animation. Rarely do you leave a film, in my experience, with poor plot and sloppy design and confusing scenes and think it is saved by the beauty of the movement. Instead, I found, many films had strong plots; they had strong images and movement; they had interesting scenes and characters and were brought to life. It is with this in mind, along with my own experience as an animator, that I felt the need to spend so much time in so many other places: in the design and the story, in the fabrication and set construction, even the lighting and composition were something I felt stronger in than the details of the movement of the characters themselves. This was a conscious choice, and while it is something that gets critiqued, (it was not not-bad enough) it is, like my experience in other films, not the first thing that gets said nor the most important part of the work.

I feel strongly about this, and understand that it is a part of this project that it most susceptible to those critiques but likewise I also find that its something I will continue to argue in the making of film. In the world of the film, it meant that finished was better than perfect and with an eight minute film, all lip synced to music, with full puppets by one person, it is a decision I would make again and again and again.

That said, I also had scenes I loved animating. I had a number of shots that were incredibly effective and a number of shots that were interesting and unusual in the manner in

which they were produced. I greatly enjoyed this part of the project, in its own way. Locked in the studio, without cell reception and only several hundred more photographs to go in a night was like being in outer space and it was an experience that I truly loved.

The Mirror

I knew the longest shot going into the production would be the mirror-bedroom-theater transition. It was more than 1,100 frames and would require a lot of work. I got it done over an entire weekend and while I was exhausted by the end of it, I was very happy. It had a lot going on with both characters acting, a special effect (the mirror collapsing) and then a full transition after that but it worked very well with Ben's lighting and never had any serious production issues. Although it was not the best shot in the film, it remains one of my favorites because it was such a triumph of my storyboard coming to life.



Fig 26 – Mirror-bedroom-theater transition.

The Garden of Eden

I also really enjoyed all the scenes in the garden. They were creatively some of the best ones to put together and done at a time when my animation was at its peak. Of notice, was the long panning shot, because it worked out so well and was a good demonstration of what I really thought I could do in a way that really worked out well. I took huge images from my Dragonframe setup, nearly 5k RAW and jpegs specifically so that I could make effects like I have in the large panning shot in the garden. I used the motion-control rig in a number of shots and I used it in a creative number of ways, which really was a fun production process. For this particular shot, I set up the camera to pan across the scene, but, due to the large

images I was recording was that I would compose my shot to be a fairly small portion of it, and in post I tacked the camera to the center of the scene. This gave me a sort of focused rotation pan, which still had all the parallax change of a true rotation, but done on the single motor motion tracker I had access to.



Fig 27 – Large Garden pan

Coattails' Dance

I also used the motion control device for the black-light scene in Coattails' final song. In the shot, Coattails is dancing while the black light is flashing over it, and this was also done on the motion-control. It has a slight fade in and out which was done by arranging the motion control vertically and making a rig to anchor the black-light. This was a great effect, and

because I was following an animatic and song lyrics, I could program the motion-control to hit on exactly the poses I needed it to in Dragonframe. It was a great moment in the success of my X-sheets, as well as an effect I had wanted to incorporate in the earliest drafts of my animatic. I also greatly enjoyed matching the skeleton up to the frames as a separate asset and matching it to the prior animation. It was something I was afraid was impossible, but it was a great effect that worked exactly as I wanted.

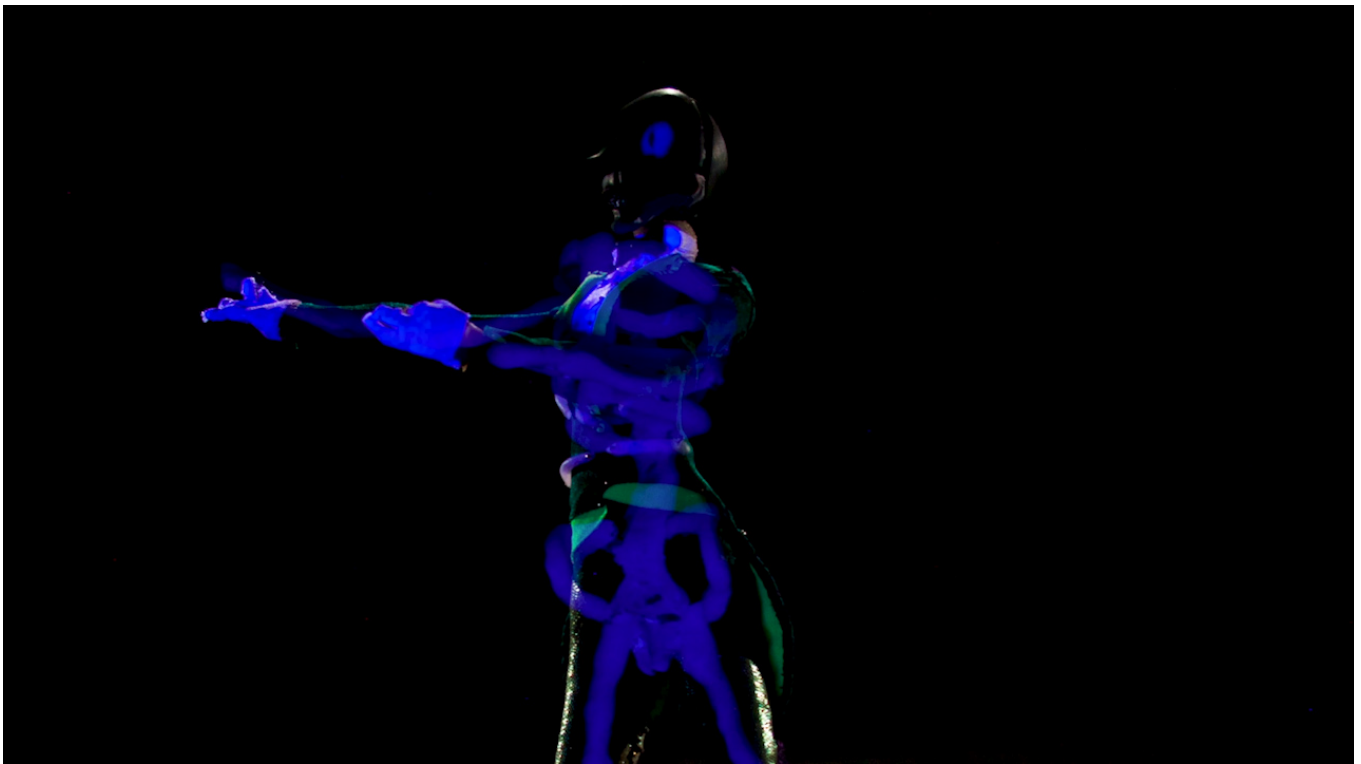


Fig 28 – Coattails' Dance with composite skeleton

The Quincenera

The quincenera scene took a lot of work. It was one of the first scenes I shot with both characters and it was the first of several shots I would have to do in a single weekend. Like the mirror shot, it was a kind of lock-in-till-it's done, and I think there is a lot that works. It is

worth noting, however, that this was initially going to be a team-animated shot with several other animators helping me along the way. After seven hours of work, though, we had shot only seventy photographs and not made nearly enough progress, and in addition, the puppets were simply not of the quality I liked. I re-shoot it immediately alone and was much more happy. It was also a place where, while I had been using Ben Strack to help with my lighting, some of these shots, especially the reverse shots, were done on my own. I think they were done exceptionally well in terms of composition and lighting, which was an element I didn't feel incredibly confident about going into the project. It was a success in terms of my own confidence and skill, and even more so because it was a clear sign to me that, unfortunately, I would have to be the one to do the work.



Fig 29 – Qincenera Dance

Serpent Morph

The climax shot of the film, to me, is the transformation of Coattails to the serpent. It was a creative scene that was slow and really bridged the film between the experiences of Magdalene's and the more biblical themes I really wanted to express. I took this shoot in three parts: I shot the beginning, while Magdalene takes her head off her shoulders, and then falls into the background first. Then I shot the end, after the snake had formed around Magdelene and uncoiled. Finally I shot the connecting frames last. I used a lot of tricks for this shot, with a very large rig on the Magdalene head while it was in space, a hard use of light and shadow to hide Coattails in the background, and animation basics, like cutting on motion to really get

the effect correctly. In retrospect, I would have liked a little more anticipation, but I think the effect and follow through really works and if there is one shot that seems like it would be the most difficult to do in stop-motion, this shot was it from the outset, and I knew it. To that degree, I think this shot is something of a totem for the entire piece. While it has some errors in the animation, the design is really something that I had initially imagined, and it has a lot of tricks that makes it work.



Fig 30 – Serpent Morph

Opening Zoom Out

The opening shot was simple, but it was a success of the project and paying attention

to my schedule and listening to the way the film was taking shape. I shot it very last, and had originally wanted to shoot a plasticine morph-opening, but due to time it would have been a choice between shooting it or re-shooting a few other shots I really wanted to include. Instead I found another solution that serves my purposes to the same degree and is altogether more in vogue for the nature of my production. I really liked the vision of seeing all the pieces of the stage before the performance begins. It serves a kind of Chekov function: here are the things that will be presented, sit down, let's watch it all matter, and it was also an immediate moment that Vicky's sound design really elevated.



Fig 31 – Opening Pan

I re-shot two scenes: The bathroom was the very first shot I made and I was still

learning a lot about how the puppets function and the nature of how to animate. I think the shot was stronger in the second take, but well, not entirely different. On the other hand, I also re-shot the first shot post title and that was a really successful moment. The original shot had been functionally the same, but, well, lacking in a lot of detail that made it interesting and in the camera pan, one of the first I used the motion-control in, the Magdalene slipped out of the focus right in the last second. In redoing it, I got to include a lot more artistic reference, and again allude to the stories I wanted to discuss. The animation was better and the film was strongly improved in both cases. Not only the above, but that I even had the time to re-shoot was a surprise and a demonstration of my dedication to this project. The scenes I had originally shot were fine. They worked for the film. But being able to re-shoot them gave me an incredible sense of accomplishment and while I think they directly improved the film, it also let me finish production on an extraordinarily high note. I really got it all done to a degree I was really happy with.

Like every other element of the production, animation dove-tailed with post-production. With Ben as my Cinematographer, and Paul Bens as my post lead, post-production was finally a step that I could put in other hands, which was a relief while I finished animation.

.

Chapter 5: A Collection of Fires and Putting Them Out:

Post-Production

My overall post-production process was one of the only stages where I handed shots off to a chain of people. The first stage of the process was color. As above, I had shot on RAW images in order so I could hand off shots to Ben for color. Color correction was exported as Targa files to preserve color space and be easy to manipulate in Nuke for correction and compositing. Depending on the shot and the difficulty for the digital clean up it was handed off to a team of people and then finally assembled in After Effects. There was a large space consideration for this process where shots could take hours to transfer hands, but between Ben's fiber internet connection, my own series of drives and render-share, we could have as many as four shots in simultaneous stages of post-production.

Paul, who was busy with a number of projects stepped in to put out a few fires along the way, but his strongest contribution to the process was overseeing this multi-stage tactic and having him endorse the file sizes we were using.

Color correction was one of the best experiences in the project. First of all, I have a great deal of trust in Ben, who had done color for a few projects prior. Being colorblind, I couldn't afford to be too choosy on my color and so the line we found was for me to provide a two-tone color pallet for Ben for each scene. The quincenera was gold and black; the bathroom was blue and white; the sex scenes were violet and red; the garden was green with high saturation. Ben pulled a frame from every shot and did a color test for approval, then would export the entire scene.

Because of the nature of the the transitions in my film, the transition shots were

exported in both color spaces, and then run through identical Nuke clean up and transitioned in After Effects. The mirror shot is perhaps the best example of this, where the color shifts as the lights dim and change. The final shot of returning to her previous vignettes near the end was the only shot where this color shift happened 4 times, because of the transitions in a single shot.

Post-color was often a simple task. The first step was digital clean up. Rigs, dust, screw drivers and c-stands were removed from a lot of shots. This usually involved my own notes, having animated each shot, and watching the shot, but meant that I could hand the simple roto work off to a team of volunteers. Nick Donnatelli, Luke Polito, Cody Barron and Paul Bens were used for these simple steps. After clean up, only select shots required more work in Nuke and the rest of the final post production was done in After Effects. Due to the large dimensions of the shots, this did occasionally mean that some clean up was done outside of the final frame but the process was simple and fast to be worth keeping a system over looking too closely on a shot-to-shot basis. The additional advantage to Targa was that, among other data the file type records, we could do a lot work in the post clean up. Cropping, alpha spaces and visibility were primary concerns in this part and meant that the final assembly was a little lighter as well as keeping a large number of back up for each shot and options as we went out of Nuke and into After Effects.

One of the primary processes of the digital clean up was the frames – literal frames within the shot that contained the action. A few shots had frames, especially the mirrors in the

mirror transition and the bathroom. These caused problems in the animation because they were handled by the actors or bumped in the process of animation, and had to be digitally corrected in Nuke. Much of the post work was covered by having the advantage of large, mailable files, from covering stray lights or nudged elements in the shot, to covering mistakes in the recording. For example I left the stabilization on in one shot, and it was a simple process in post to track the shot and stabilize the arbitrary correction the camera had inflicted.

There was one additional big issue that we had removed in post. I realized, especially after color, that the paint on the puppet had weathered differently on the body and arms (in silicone) than on the head (in printed resin). Like the design, story, and lighting of the piece this was not an issue I foresaw, having not worked with darker skin tones, but the effect of having a puppet with considerably lighter skin and a dark face was hugely problematic and came at the eleventh hour.

I owe everything to Paul for this solution, which was done swiftly and immediately, though it was a team effort. For one, Ben could crunch color in After Effects and desaturated some of the scenes to lower the visible difference. Paul came in with a tool made in Nuke that would add a screened orange gold color to the face and then both met in the middle. Only about 5 shots had to have this additional step added due to either the overall color space of the rest of the shots or simply that the weathering was only visible in the shots completed last.

On the opposite side of the post work from the color and technical was the sound by

Vicky and Kyle. This was another element of the project I was pretty hands-off about. I had really great experiences working with Kyle and Vicky and I had a lot of faith in their work.

Like color, sound was something that I didn't have a lot of faith in my own ability to curate the details on. So, likewise, I provided Vicky with some notes – places where I had particular sound notes and some emotional points. With Vicky as well, I described in the most specific terms when the “reality” of the theater space should come forward and when the space was in a more imagined terms. I really enjoyed working with Vicky especially because she makes all her own sounds. Hardly anything from her work was “taken” directly from other sound collections and instead she crafted most of the sounds. We got along very well as we worked and agreed on more points that we didn't.

Kyle was present for all of the sound recordings with the voice actresses, at least digitally, and I was likewise very happy with his work. He had ears for the performance that I didn't and knew what he wanted for the music he wrote.

I insisted that Kyle keep his files exported separately, and thus Vicky had three pieces when she came to mix: vocals, music and sound. Being a musical, and therefor sung, it was important to push the vocals and this meant that I would be crunching the atmosphere, which I felt bad about, but needed to be maintained for the project. I also found that when I have worked with a dedicated sound designer, especially ones who work primarily in live-action, the sound tends to be over-designed, with ambiance and atmosphere that isn't in the animation or, occasionally, distracts from the screen. Often the composer has considered a lot

of these elements in the emotional beats anyways, and while I won't go into detail here, I think animation lends itself to being a musical medium almost as much as it is visual. It plays a little better, is all.

In any event, Kyle was precise, Vicky was flexible and everyone was professional. The sound of the piece, obviously, was critical. If my account here seems brief, it is perhaps because it was happening constantly through the project. Kyle took the earliest drafts of my treatments and put them to lyric. We had complete music by January, and Vicky was the first person to sign the contract to work for me, having scored a musical prior and being an excellent and experienced sound designer and mixer to boot.

The other delightful outcome of this is that I have the music. For whatever would happen, whatever changed or whatever would become of the piece, I had these 5-7 artifacts of the affair. Real songs I helped write, with people I loved working with and crystalline things that I can hold and be proud of. Which is about where I was with the rest of the piece.

What I talk about when I talk about Art.

Finishing the project.

I finished my thesis at 9AM the Friday it was due, but I got it all done. I had, as demanded, kept a backup, less final version just in case, but I came into school on Tuesday and worked straight through till that Friday and I got it all done.. I took a four hour nap on

Wednesday. But I got it all done.

I got it all done and that was an amazing triumph for me. To the extent that I had set out for myself in the finished animatic of January, it was complete. I re-shot two shots and they were stronger for it. I solved my compositing problems. I built the models I set out to – the puppets, the props. I had the transitions I wanted in between the scenes. I made an eight minute musical. I considered the font and color of my credits and title. I can tell someone with purpose that the title of the piece is *Coattails & Paradise*, with ampersand.

I had also done it with a very ideal budget, coming in well under my projected costs.

Sheet1

Item	Quantity	Fee	Subtotal	In Kind?	Total	Notes
Story						
Script	1	0	0			0
Musical Writer	1	300	300			300
Talent						
Lead Actors	3	250	750			1050
Production Personnel						
Sound Mix, Design	1	1000	1000			2050
Musical Composition	1	300	300	Yes		2050
Production Equipment						
Camera replacement	1	250	250			2300
Materials						
Puppet Rigs	3	400	1200			3500
Silicone, Molding Mat.	1	200	200			3700
Fabric and Finishing	1	100	100			3800
3D Printing	1	300	300			4100
Set Base Mat.	1	500	500			4600
Metal Flooring	1	600	600			5200
Metal Worker	1	300	300			5500
Distribution						
Festival Applications	10	30	300			5800

All of this is to say, on Friday, I was incredibly happy. I had been approved by my adviser and I had it all. A single eight minute artifact of my work over the past year.

I wrote my artist statement a few times. I went back and forth on how to talk about the project, but I was really happy with what I settled on. This is my MFA and a project I would have to stand in front of and represent. I thought about writing something that was heavy on the details, or something that really talked about film as it is important to me, but I ended on something that was key to me, something poetic and rapid-fire that might be an artist statement I would make rather than something that was explicitly helpful to engage with.

I am including it here because it also gives a good summation of this paper. What I had in mind, what I chose as being important to state directly and the sheer amount of places a project like this comes from, from me.

““To achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan, and not quite enough time.”

– Leonard Bernstein

“I always thought Eve and the serpent must have conversed at greater length than Genesis records. That the most crucial conversation in Judeo-Christian theology is between a woman and a beast suggests that the voices that count are not always those of the fathers.... ...Imagine what Eve and the snake might have had to say to each other about becoming symbols and scapegoats, about how they would be represented and misrepresented, about what kind of places they would encounter and what it would take to make those places seem like home or Paradise.”

--Rebecca Solnit, *As Eve Said to the Serpent*

Well, It wasn't always this good.

It used to be better. I guess it used to be a lot of things.

But it could have been a musical, a high school bathroom, a stewardess, a magician.

Stewardesses is the longest word you can type with only your left hand on a QWERTY keyboard in the correct position. I don't know what that means but I know that no matter how hard I try to be dexterous I will always be sinistral. Sometimes I want to fight but usually all I end up doing is dancing. Sometimes I cry or I laugh, but Baby, Baby I'll be better someday.

As Douglass Coupland says, a real, imminent truth does exist. My brother coined the term Meat Prison but Vonnegut calls it The Chemicals and Tom Robbins "all that packaging around some luminescent orb" and whatever it is, its very true to me.

Mine is a machine that needs fuel and cooling and diversions all so that in the fleeting moments that matter most, I might keep my full attention and, like Robin Williams in a Terry Gilliam epic, become truly perfect through that separation. A body as a shell that carries the mind from one moment in time to another. A complaining, tired, disintegrating, shambling, drooling, shitting hungry wretch shackled all to some intangible immortal actual self.

God, how great it would be to break into song! That musical kitsch to pause time while the patrons in a bar agree with you through choreography. To glimpse reality with 35mm precision. Something universal through a narrative that could be individually specific, that rare privilege of a filmmaker. But, like the great American myths we are so ready to continue retelling, they say that "with great power comes great responsibility." And a film about bodies needs to consider what those bodies look like.

This is a practiced exercise. We choose what we depict and what we accept. I guess this was probably the hardest part. The days and drafts spent deciding between a prom and quincenera, the color of a dress, a cleft chin with an effeminate voice went to a story committee of nine. In needing a dissenting voice, I wanted to avoid another fatherly inquisition.

Knock hard on the ceilings of the Sistine Chapel if everyone already knows you are standing inside it. But if you are going to invite Brecht, you might as well set a place for Chekov at the table.

Because symbols matter. Because we are who we pretend to be. Because representation matters.

Because I have to pretend it all matters. I have to pretend that I am getting closer to something ethereal and real. Stories about hope and stories about people we need stories about.

Maybe paradise never got lost. Maybe we find on prom nights and high-school bathrooms. Maybe we find it in a play in 1/5th scale. Maybe we find it in bodies made out of steel and silicone. Maybe we find it in souls brought to life in the spaces between 24ths of a second. But Paradise could have been a lot of things. It could have been a garden, a girl, an apple, a snake.

Here's a film about bodies and stewardesses. I can't pretend that it's perfect because nothing ever was. Storytelling is a craft we perfect through iteration and attempts. I think, baby, I'll be better someday and we're getting there, but, well, it wasn't always this good..."

I really like this statement. I think it speaks to things that were core in my creation of this project and it does so in an indirect way that I personally like to stand in-front of as an artist. It's a good cap to a long piece which doesn't directly explain anything but also does show some of the people and places that the piece comes from. I didn't want it to feel explicitly apologetic, but I also wanted it to say that while this is my MFA thesis, things move forward. That I keep working and making work.

It also, briefly addresses something that I have described indirectly in this paper, but was an important part of the entire process, namely, that there are about 70 names in the end credits of the piece and it was important to me that while I was the creator and director, this was also a project of managing people and things. It was a success of coordination as much as a success of storytelling.

Premier Night! or My Kingdom for a Subwoofer.

Reception and Critique

All of this is in some way to say that on Friday I felt ecstatic. I had finished this huge project. I had done everything and more that I set out to do. I had checked every box. Tom Gasek, my adviser, had approved the project. The sound design teacher, Dave Sluberski had approved it. My cinematographer and post leads had approved it. I was going into the “premiere” showing of my film ready with an artist statement I was happy with. I had helped my lyricist and musician come up to Rochester from NYC to come see it. I was really happy to stand up and take credit for something I was sure was successful.

They say it is a poor craftsperson who blames their tools, but they also say that a good artist uses good supplies. In that not-quite-healthy-way that we do, I think I will forever blame the final reception of my project on the sound system that it was shown on, or the base-heavy mix that Vicky settled on. First impressions are important, and I know that looking beyond them, especially at something static like a finished film, is difficult. But I was profoundly disappointed that when my piece was shown, that the speaker system in the auditorium gave heavy feedback and seriously hurt the clarity of the music. While this would have been a problem for any piece, mine needed the music. I had gone over with Kyle and Vicky and my own work the importance of making the story clear and visible while also being sung and performed. While some animation is improved with a full sound design, mine relied on it. It was as though 60% of my work was gone and it was and it is intimidating to readdress the project after the fact.

These kinds of technical difficulties are especially hard during thesis projects because they so strongly change the result of the feedback and impressions of the film. I received very little critique where I expected it. Very few notes on the animation, day of. Very few notes on the characters and settings, the transitions I really struggled over and the lyrics and songs I spent months writing. One in particular sticks out which was that my story was not clear on the first watch through, and while I want to address that end – in direct terms I could have controlled (did I dive too far deep into symbol and metaphor, hoping the message was delivered? Should I have been more repetitive and direct about the questions I was trying to address? Was this character really the best way to talk about this topic?) – I instead find myself frustrated with the response of “of course the story was hard to follow. The speakers kept the vocals from being clear.” My mother was in the audience. She couldn't understand a word. It was hard to stand in front of a project that had taken so much of my time a life and energy and feel like everyone's first impression was boiled down to something I could not have anticipated.

A more direct way of expressing this is to say that I also do not feel the project got the recognition it deserved. I made a complete film in a format that was very unique. RIT had not had a stop-motion film at the scale or spectacle of my film. RIT had not seen technology used in the manner of my film, nor had a SOFA animation often used so many people in coordination from so many parts. I had writers from NYC, a voice actress from Brooklyn, a team of story-editors from around the world. I put together an 8-minute film and never

sacrificed what I wanted to include. I didn't cut shots at the 11th hour. I re-shot and improved them. I don't think the animation was interstellar, but if there is a reason for that its because in three years of MFA at RIT, I never had an *animation* teacher teach an *animation* class. I knew my limitations and my expectations going into this project and I exceeded them. I created new ways of fabricating at RIT and used the space and equipment to such a degree that by the end of the project I was giving tutorials in other classes on the equipment I learned to use.

I think that this was a project worthy of the honors show, and more-so, it was a project I was specifically trying to make to place highly on the honors show. While there is an amount of politics in every final list, and I did make the mentions, I think I worked harder and made more important work than many of my peers. And while I think there are a lot of reasons why my project is more worthy of critique or why the existing list includes truly better films, it will, always, come down to the fact that I blame the first impressions garnered by my film on that subwoofer, which even the sound teacher himself said, "Should be taken out back behind the barn and shot." *That's* an award I would be honored to be nominated for.

The Unbearable Burden of Progress: North of Neutral

Conclusion

This film isn't dead, though. And it's not complete. One thing I am getting the hang of from RIT is applying to festivals, and as I hear more and more stories and reports, plus the experience with several of my own films, I am finding how I want to present this project to continue its longevity as I go forwards. I will begin my festival tour in 2018, which means I have to sit on the project for almost 6 months. In that time, I have been cleaning up corners and edges, fixing spots that still stand out to me and making a series of pieces to have a strong festival run. This includes a poster for the film, which was made with the assistance of Tianyi Yin:



Fig 33 – *Coattails & Paradise* Poster

As well as an official trailer for the film, made in part because Vicky was kind enough to give me her mixed music, vocals and sound effects files separately. And even a making-of portion of the film which is currently only a small reel to be expanded on.

In addition, the film will have a full social media support and a lot of festival applications. It is hard to watch other films find immediate success, but if I truly believe that my film is better than its premiere, taking it seriously is the least that I owe it.

I hope most that this writing makes it clear that this project was one of passion and direction. It was a chance to make my own film, and it was a requirement of my degree, but it was something that I was going to be incredibly careful about. From initial ideas, which altered dramatically, to maintaining my relationships with story editors, musicians and assistants, I worked hard to make this film not just an assembly of many parts but stronger for those individuals.

This is a film that sacrificed very little in what was most important to me. It was made using some of the best materials and processes available. It was supervised by experts when I needed assistance. This was not a film that was “done this way because it needs to be done,” but instead was a film that reveled in its parts and details.

This was a film that was important to me. It was a story that I find essential and it was delivered in a way that makes it appropriate. It dives into language and specifics of some of the most important imagery available to me.

This is a film that was made while I was a full-time student as well; a film made over

the first semester of teaching my own class; a film made during the 2016 election and the Trump Presidency after.

It was ambitious and I knew it, but it was best summed up before it all began.

During the summer before this film, I realized how hard the entirety of the project was going to be. I was nominated for the Princess Grace Fellowship Grant and during the application it occurred to me how much work and organization the project would actually take. That I would have to be building sets and real puppets I had only indirectly made before. That I would be animating in a medium I had animated a total of about 2 minutes in prior. And I thought about re-submitting my thesis proposal. To the side of my other work I had been brainstorming a totally different film. It was a 2D line-art and morph animation about sports and sex, juxtaposing the idealistic bodies of a professional athlete with the repetitive motions and visualized elements of their routine in a sexuality manor. It would have been a project I would have wanted Brian Larson to advise on over Tom Gasek. It would have had no lip-sync or singing, scanty any diegetic sound at all. And I think it would have been a good project. It would have been playing to my strengths and it would have been funny and it would have been beautiful. I almost re-proposed to make *A Good Safe Film*.

But it would not have been this project. It would not have been a spectacle, or such a huge production. It would not have taken the risks that I took to make *Coattails & Paradise* and it would not have taken advantage of the resources and space at RIT that I will never have again. It might have been a great film, but it would never have been a film that I would stand

so confidently behind for my Masters in Fine Art.

Most importantly, it would not have been the crystalline form that *Coattails & Paradise* was. I say in the introduction that a perfect film needs to be immaculately precise. That it needs to use its medium to express its subject and its subject needs to be stronger for the medium used. It needs to be given a voice that is worth hearing. Perhaps not the first, but a new variation on that take. And it needs to be timely. A good film needs to be aware of the stories and histories around it and add to a positive world. As artists we are asked, in my opinion, to look north of neutral, to find importance in what we can say and how we can say it. *Coattails & Paradise* was this film for me. It was highly considered, and reveled in the medium it used. It could not have been done a year earlier or a year later. It could not be done outside of RIT. It could not be done without Kyle and Vicky, but it couldn't be done without Erica, Elliot, Morgan, Lauren or Kemiando either.

Next year I will make *Sportsex*. I will need a tablet and TV Paint and the Adobe Cloud. I will never make *Coattails & Paradise* again. I don't think that alone makes it worthy of the MFA, but I hope that this paper demonstrates all the additional pieces and essence given to the project over 10 months that does make it worthy.

Thank you,

-Nicholas – Knhik – Martin Haefner

Coattails and Paradise

Knhik Haefner

Thesis Proposal

For MFA in Film and Animation

School of Film and Animation

Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York

March, 2016

Approved for Submission by:

Thomas Gasek, Thesis Chair,

Brian Larson, Thesis Advisor

TBD, Thesis Advisor

Log line: A series of vignettes about being happy in the skin you are in.

Treatment: There is a brief montage of images: a snake, fangs out, bites into a ripe apple. As it does it morphs into a child suckling at its mother's breast. It morphs into the moon circling earth.

MAGDALINE (young woman) is walking on the surface. Behind her is a massive feathered snake. She says "Well, it wasn't always this good."

A series of IM messages crosses the frame. Magdalene is reciting them as she responds out loud to the messages, but she is occasionally distracted. The messages are about her. The camera reveals that her head is sitting on the desk in front of the computer. Behind her, in the foreground, are two bodies having sex. She is occasionally distracted. The messages introduce her and her awareness of the world. She says making love doesn't fulfill her. As she does she comes to orgasm.

After sex, her body finds and reattaches her head. There is another montage of her cleaning up and getting ready to go out: She paints her nails, combs her hair, puts on a dress, shoes etc. She goes out to the city in the middle of the colorful Day of the Dead celebration: skulls and flowers and lights are everywhere. She buys bread and fruit from a vendor and goes to the graveyard to pay her respects.

As she stands in the festive graveyard, COATTAILS uncoils from the shadows in the sky. At first, a massive snake, he takes the form of a snake in a suit behind her. While families are visiting their dead relatives around her, she tells him she has an envy of the dead: no longer tied to physical bodies, they are remembered more perfectly. Coattails asks her when she started to feel that she didn't like her body.

There is a brief flash of an argument. Magdalene throws a plate and sees blood on her fingers. She says "Don't call me a life-bringer like I'm something you can buy at the fucking Shaper Image."

The scene changes. She is 15, at her Quincenera. She sees the other girls looking pretty in their party dresses and moves her hands around her waist. She thinks about her fat, bunched up at her sides. The dress is too tight. Fifteen-year-old Magdalene says she remembers first seeing a girl as something to be desired. How she felt so inadequate in front of the other pretty smiling faces.

The snake coils around her in the graveyard. He asks her if she would take it back. The skulls on the trees become apples. The snake asks if she could, would she return to Eden?

She is screaming as the scene changes again. Her body flails through a school bathroom, holding her head and her school books in her arms and rushing to put the head on. Blood flows out of her legs. She is embarrassed. An apple falls out of her backpack.

The snake coils around her arm, briefly becoming bondage ropes. The scene changes. Two

bodies are having sex. Their heads are set on the table, talking and laughing while the bodies copulate. She looks into the face of the man and says she wishes she could stay like this forever. He laughs.

The snake is coiled through the graveyard. He asks if she would take it all back. Would she give up her body, her shame? Would she start humans over? Could she be the Eve that turns him down?

They are standing on the surface of the moon. The earth is green and young and new. Magdalene smiles. She says no. She says she doesn't want to be a life-bringer or a mother or a wife or a woman. She wants to be a mind. But she looks back at the earth and smiles.

The fifteen-year-old Magdalene says, to no one in particular at her Quinceañera, that she wouldn't feel this way if she hadn't been in this dress.

She is in the bathroom, opening a tampon. She says she wouldn't know these things if her body hadn't lived them.

Her head looks into the eyes of her lover, both of them on the floor while their bodies are mid-orgasm. She says she wouldn't get to laugh if she hadn't been here to feel this way.

In the graveyard, she turns to Coattails and says she wouldn't choose to be only her mind. She needs her body keep her brain hungry. She turns to the graves and the festival food laid out in front of them. She says she wouldn't choose to be a life bringer because she isn't done with her experience. She smiles at the camera and takes a bite of an apple.

Rational: Approach to narrative is very important to me. It is an understanding of the tools that inform the stories I want to tell. At its core, *Coattails and Paradise* is about a very universal truth: that as an individual, we tend to want to see ourselves and our conscious minds as one distinct persona. When this self-created image is foiled with the reality of the physical body, there is a frustration and a schism that forms between the self and reality. This story is about that: someone who feels a separation between the mind – an ideal self – and the body – the reality that confronts it.

There are a few other elements that I feel are important when creating my story, however. The first two dovetail: I strongly believe the best stories talk about big things in a specific way. It is not enough to have a discussion, but instead to coat it with a flavor that lends itself to the specific discussion at hand. I also think that the choice is a very important one. Representation and the stories we continue to tell *matter*. For those reasons, my story is not about a white male, nor is it about “a person.” It is about an individual. It is about a Mexican girl. That choice, though, shouldn't be arbitrary and so, this is a story about what it means to be a woman as I relate it to the theme and it is set in a place where I hope it will likewise work towards the narrative and theme I want to discuss: the Day of

the Dead.

Finally, this is a stop-motion animation. In a world where every sound and shape are made and come to life only through the final composition of images and pieces, it is exactly a space where I can talk about someone who feels their body is a machine or a thing to deliver their consciousness: the all important intangible idea that is a personality.

This is a story about a woman. It is a story about an envy for the dead and desire to be perfect. It is an old story. A story about the choice to bite from the fruit of knowledge and leave paradise and realization that no matter how you feel about yourself, you will, unlike a snake, have to live in the skin you are born in.

This piece is informed by the following works:

The Adventures of Baron Munchausen, Directed by Terri Gilliam

The Eagleman Stag by Mikey Please

Fierce Invalids Home from Hot Climates by Tom Robbins

Grim Fandango by Tim Schafer

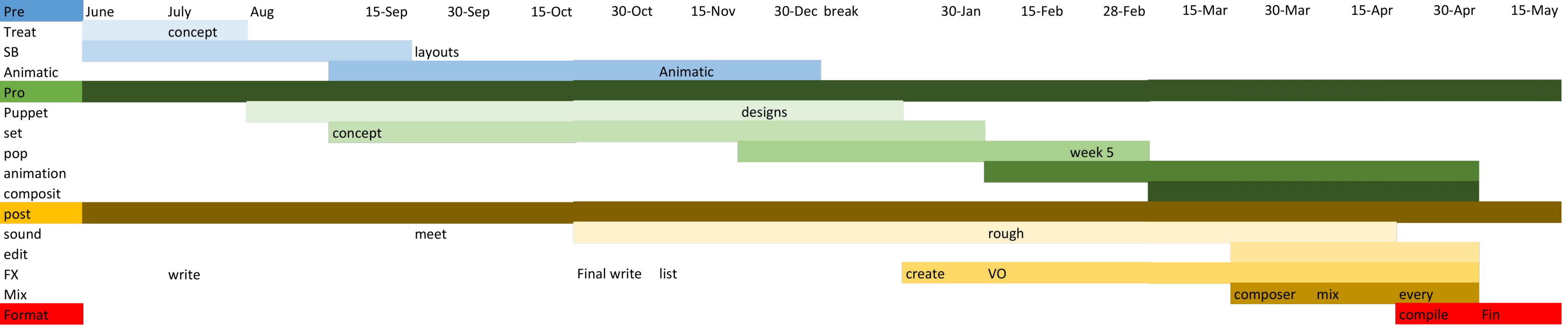
Slaughterhouse Five by Kurt Vonnegut

Vision: This stop-motion animation relies pretty heavily on the vocal performances, but the design of this piece is vital. The world should be colorful but a little dark. Slightly over-saturated. I envision world to be constantly in the Day of the Dead: a celebration of the perfectly remembered dead. Bright neon lights and dark, cartoony surfaces. My characters are heavily caricatured and oddly proportioned mostly so understandings of “woman” or “attractive” can be taken at faith instead of requiring they be represented. While this calls for a lot of morphing, I intend to use glass painting to transition stop-motion sets. I have no apprehension about using post-production effects, but I will be attempting to do as much as possible with practical effects: reflective paint, UV sensitive colors, glass paintings in camera and full puppets. While there is a lot in the production, I also think the heavy use of close-ups cuts down the production. Finally, the story is subject to slight alterations. I would like to refine the dialogue to minimum if necessary and the role of the snake may take the form of a grandmother, other self or other persona if it fits the narrative.

The voice work is very important to me, but requires only a few people. Not as much of it as represented in my treatment necessarily calls for lipsync. The sound will be mostly musical: probably Spanish classical guitar, but diegetic sounds will be present as well.

BUDGET					
Title:	Producer:	Director:			
Days Preproduction			Minutes Running Time		
Days Shooting			:1 Shooting Ratio		
Account #	Quantity	Fee	Subtotal	Acct. Total	
100 Story					
Story and Script		1	0	0	0
200 Talent					
Producer		1 IK			
Director		1 IK			
Lead Actors		3	50	150	150
Narrator		1	200	200	350
Extras					
300 Production Personnel					
Camera Operator		1	100	100	450
Makeup/Prosthetics Artist		1 IK			
Production Assistant		1	100	100	550
Still Photographer		1 IK			
Sound Recordist		1 IK			
400 Travel and Locations					
Cast and Crew meals	na	NA			
Location Fees		1 IK			
Petty Cash	na	NA			
Equipment Cartage		1 IK			
Auto Mileage		1 IK			
Miscellaneous Expense		1 IK			
500 Production Equipment					
Camera and Support		3 IK			
Lighting		3 Ik			
Grip	NA	Na			
Sound Package		1 Ik			
Special Effects		3 Ik			
600 Art Direction					
Props	Minor CU		200	200	750
Set Dressing	3 Sets		800	2400	3150
Makeup Supplies	NA	IK			
Costumes	Puppets		800	2400	5550
900 Sound and Music					
Composer		1	300	300	5850
Recording Session		3 IK			
Music Rights	NA	NA			
Audio Stock		1 IK			
Sound Effects		1 IK			

Sound Mix	1	150	150	6000
1000 Titles and Opticals				
Art Work Cards	1 IK			
Artwork	Ik			
1100 Editing and Finishing				
Editor	1 IK			
Editing Supplies	1 Ik			
Effects	3	200	200	6200
Release Prints	1 IK			
1200 Office				
Shipping	3	200	200	6400
Duplication				
Postage				
Office Supplies	3	200	200	6600
1300 Contingency				
Contingency		15%		990
		Total		7590



Log line: Maybe she took a bite of the apple but I say I'm trying to give it back.

Rational: The approach to a narrative is very important to me. As I get better and better at understanding narrative structure, I begin to learn that big things can be discussed very quickly when presented in the correct way. It is this understanding of the tools that inform the stories I want to tell. At its core, *Coattails and Paradise* is about a very universal truth: that as an individual we tend to want to see ourselves and our conscious minds as one distinct persona. When this self-created image is foiled with the reality of the physical body, there is a frustration and a schism that forms between the self and reality. This story is about that: someone who feels a separation between the mind – an ideal self – and the body – the reality that confronts it.

There are a few other elements that I feel are important when creating a story, however. The first two dovetail: I strongly believe the best stories talk about big things in a specific way. It is not enough to have a discussion, but instead to coat it with a flavor that lends itself to the specific discussion at hand. I also think that that choice is a very important one. Representation and the stories we continue to tell *matter*. For those reasons, my story is not about a white male, nor is it about “a person.” It is about an individual. It is about a Mexican girl. That choice, though, shouldn't be arbitrary and so, this is a story about what it means to be a woman as I relate it to the theme and it is set in a place where I hope it will likewise work towards the narrative and theme I want to discuss: the Day of the Dead.

Finally, this is a stop-motion animation. In a world where every sound and shape are made and come to life only through the final composition of images and pieces, it is exactly a space where I can talk about someone who feels their body is a machine or a thing to deliver their consciousness: the all important intangible idea that is a personality.

This is a story about a woman. It is a story about an envy for the dead and desire to be perfect. It is an old story. A story about the choice to bite from the fruit of knowledge and leave paradise and realization that no matter how you feel about yourself, you will, unlike a snake, have to live in the skin you are born in.

This piece is informed by the following works:

The Adventures of Baron Munchausen, Directed by Terri Gilliam

The Eagleman Stag by Mikey Please

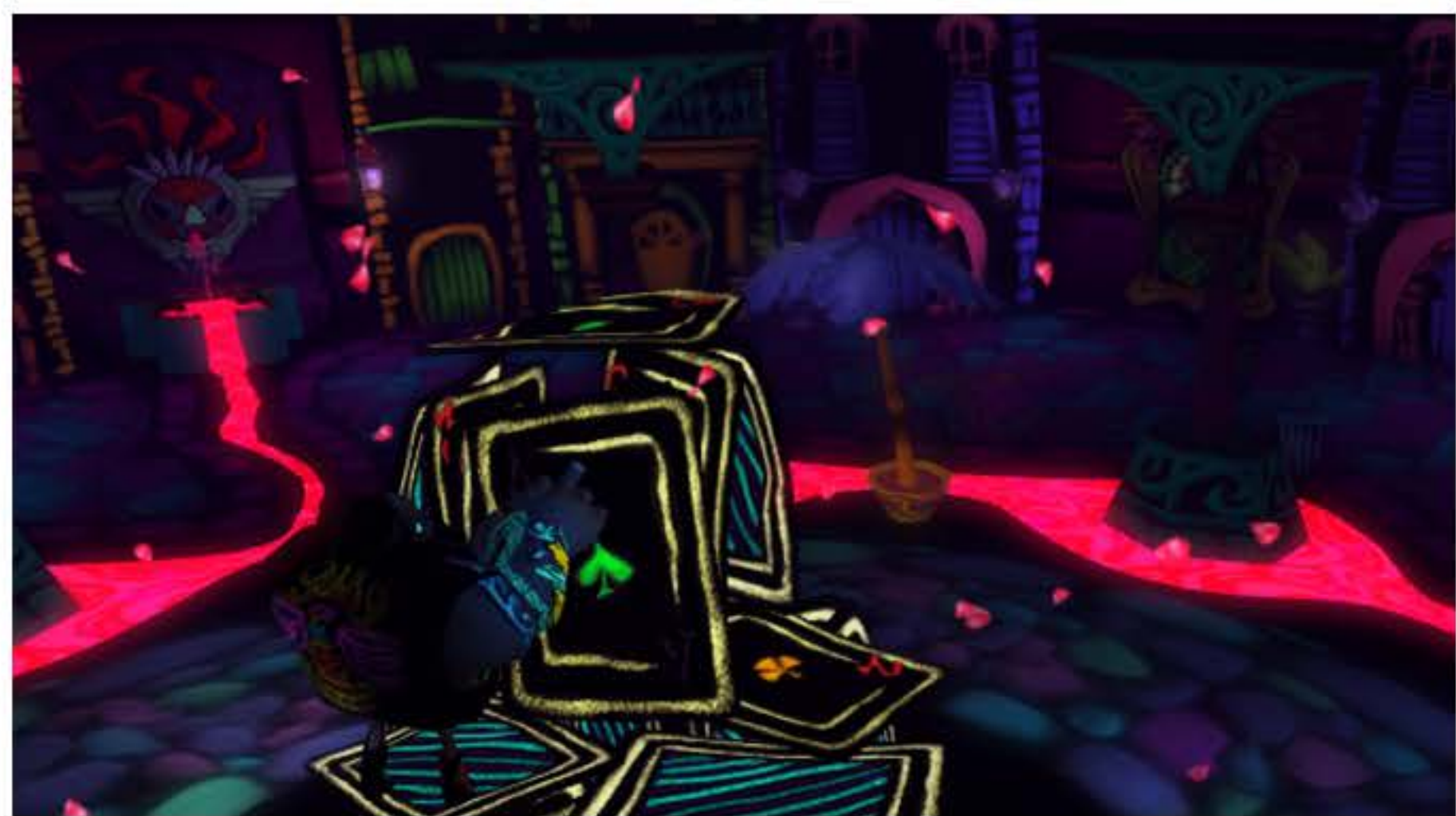
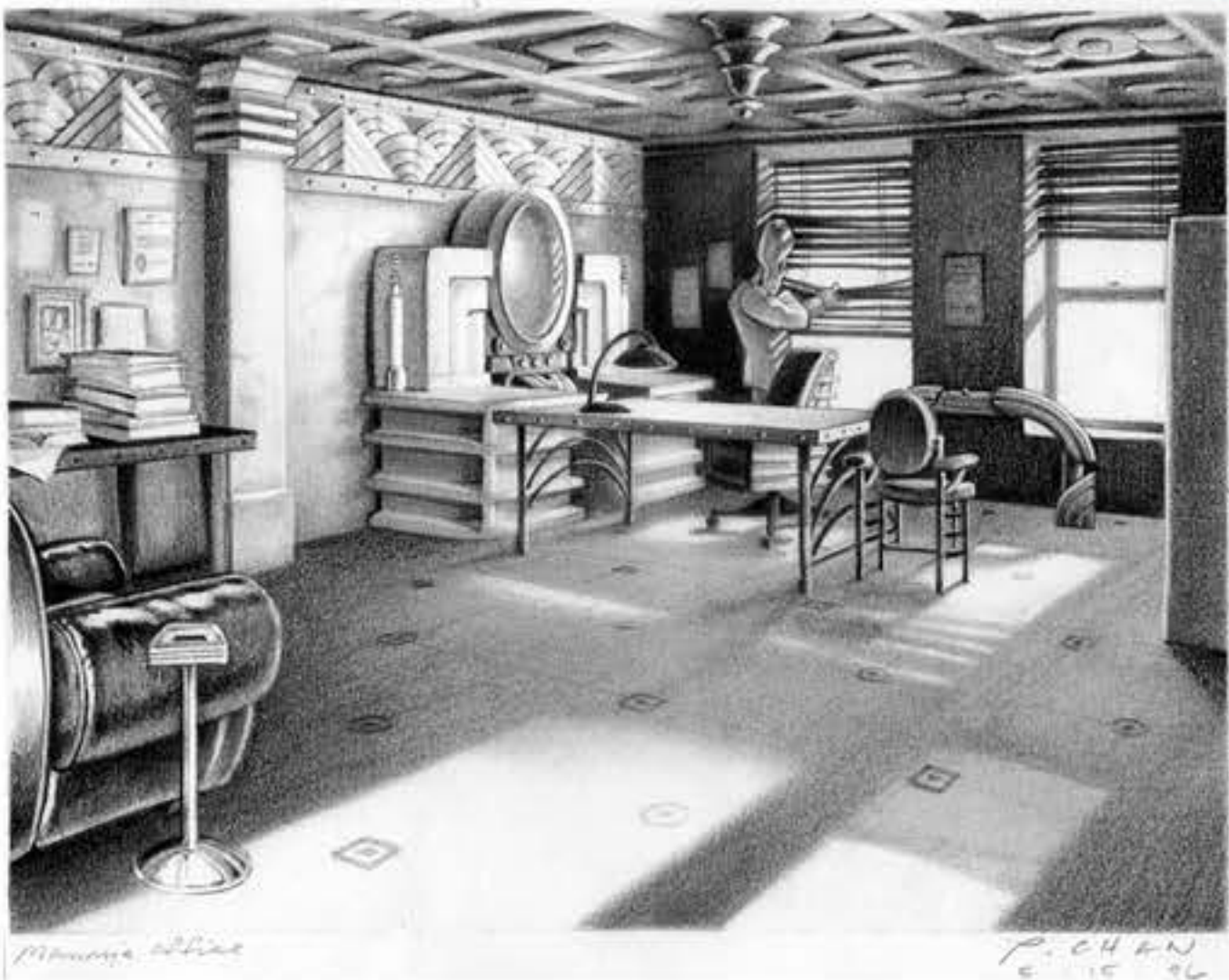
Fierce Invalids Home From Hot Climates by Tom Robbins

Grim Fandango by Tim Schafer



Knhik Hefner

Visual Reference



Coattails and Paradise Story Treatment: No dialogue.

There is a brief montage of images: A snake, fangs out, lunges at a ripe apple. In the motion, it morphs into a child suckling at its mother's breast. The two orbs move and morph as they rotate, becoming the moon circling the earth. A young woman is standing on the surface. She is Magdalene, and behind her, curling across the satellite, is a massive feathered serpent. Magdalene turns to the snake and smiles, wistfully.

Title: Coattails and Paradise

Magdalene's head is tight and center to the frame. She is looking around her while she talks. As the camera pulls out she is surrounded by a house or a palace. A space all to herself: a church or a festival hall, colorfully decorated. There is a subtle rhythmic thumping in the background.

She introduces herself a little here, in the world of her mind she is free to explore and think until she shrieks, in a sort of sore pain. The background collapses into a dark bedroom.

She is forced back into the reality of the moment: two bodies are laying in the bed, the woman's, on the bottom, is headless while a male convulses on top of it in the middle of sex. The woman's body reaches over to the night stand and puts on her head: Magdalene's. The male body stops and looks at her expectantly.

Magdalene reaches out and puts her hand on his cheek. She smiles weakly. She looks over, sitting at the end of the bed, dressed in a heavily sequined but feminine suit, Coattails, is watching, smirking. Magdalene and Coattails have a moment with the male body absent. Magdalene mentions her how her body and her mind feel like two separate things: disconnected. Coattails asks her how she could feel more whole and beckons her to come find a solution.

Magdalene gets dressed. She puts on shoes, a dress, makeup, nail polish. Coattails is at her shoulder, in the mirror, always just behind her. Coattails taunts her to come and to find something more perfect. Magdalene relents, but it's not a where; it's a when.

Magdalene follows Coattails outside but the two find themselves in a sort of dream world. Space is distorted in a kind of festival space. Colors and lights float in the trees and the structures take on a dream-like surreal aspect. The two arrive at a sort of graveyard. Shrines and lights litter the large space. Magdalene comments on the shrines of the holy, perfectly remembered dead surround the pair.

Magdalene remembers feeling very separate from the bodies here. The graves rise and become bodies at a party. They are in a large festive setting, like a prom: a quinceanera. The bodies here are cartoonish. The young boys are look like line-backers in their father's suits. The girls are

dressed up in perfect prom dresses. Magdalene is 15 at her quinceanera. Her dress is too tight. She moves her hands around her waist.

She looks out of place here, and addressing Coattails, who has followed her into her memories, she flashes back again, remembering a time when her body was a chore to be upkept.

The scene shifts and becomes a high school bathroom, empty, covered with graffiti and litter. Magdalene bursts into the room, her headless body cradling her school books and head. She sets them at the corner of the sink. Her body adjusts her outfit. Magdalene's head looks around while her body takes out her make-up kit. Her body is a series of chores here. Something to be up kept. An apple falls out of Magdalene's bag and Coattails is standing behind her body in the bathroom. Coattails shifts, becoming a snake and coils around the bathroom. There must be something those chores are worth working for, right?

Coattails winds around the arms of Magdalene, becoming bondage straps. The scene shifts. Magdalene's body is having sex, tied up while a headless male body convulses on top of her. Their heads are on the nightstand, staring into each other's eyes while they have sex on the bed. Magdalene looks into the eyes of her lover. It's a good moment to share with another mind, even if the circumstances were physical. They both laugh.

The memory fades and Magdalene is back in the surreal space. Coattails is a massive feathered snake slithering around her. She has to face her desires. Could there be a place where she wouldn't think about being inadequate, like at the party? Could there be a place where she didn't know better than to be wild and hungry and never aware of more?

The world explodes with growth. The lanterns become apples on the trees. The graves are upturned as vines and trees take it over. The world becomes lush and green and natural. Out from the outcropping, a thing enters – a wild, feral form: a woman. The snake coils around Magdalene in the foreground, who watches as Coattails' serpentine tail offers an apple to the woman.

Magdalene declines this paradise. She is someone who thinks. She could be defined by her mind.

The snake opens its mouth wide and lunges at Magdalene. It swallows her whole, and inside the mouth and ribs shift, become a towering body. Coattails stands high over Magdalene. Is this what you want to get rid of? All these meaty parts? This prison of rhythms and chores? Would she rather be a perfect image? A memory and mind? Magdalene breaks out of the forehead of the towering figure takes the hand of Coattails and she is passed around in a twirl like a ball-room dance. Maybe there's always been a question here. Maybe there has always been a human and a devil on those shoulders. Magdalene opens a box and light pours out, blinding the scene.

Magdalene gasps. She is briefly back on the surface of the moon, where they began. They are

alone here, the earth green and young and new. One possibility in one hand, another in the other. But Magdalene smiles, she is not trying to shed her skin.

Magdalene flashes back to each of her memories and she realizes that without knowing what she wanted, without knowing the feeling of frustration in her quinceanera, she wouldn't know how costly the chores of her experience were. She is back in the bathroom, cleaning up. She opens a tampon. Without working for those things, she might never have had connections and thoughts and pieces of her experience that make up her "self." She is on the floor of her bedroom, staring into the eyes of her lover. They both laugh as their bodies are in orgasm.

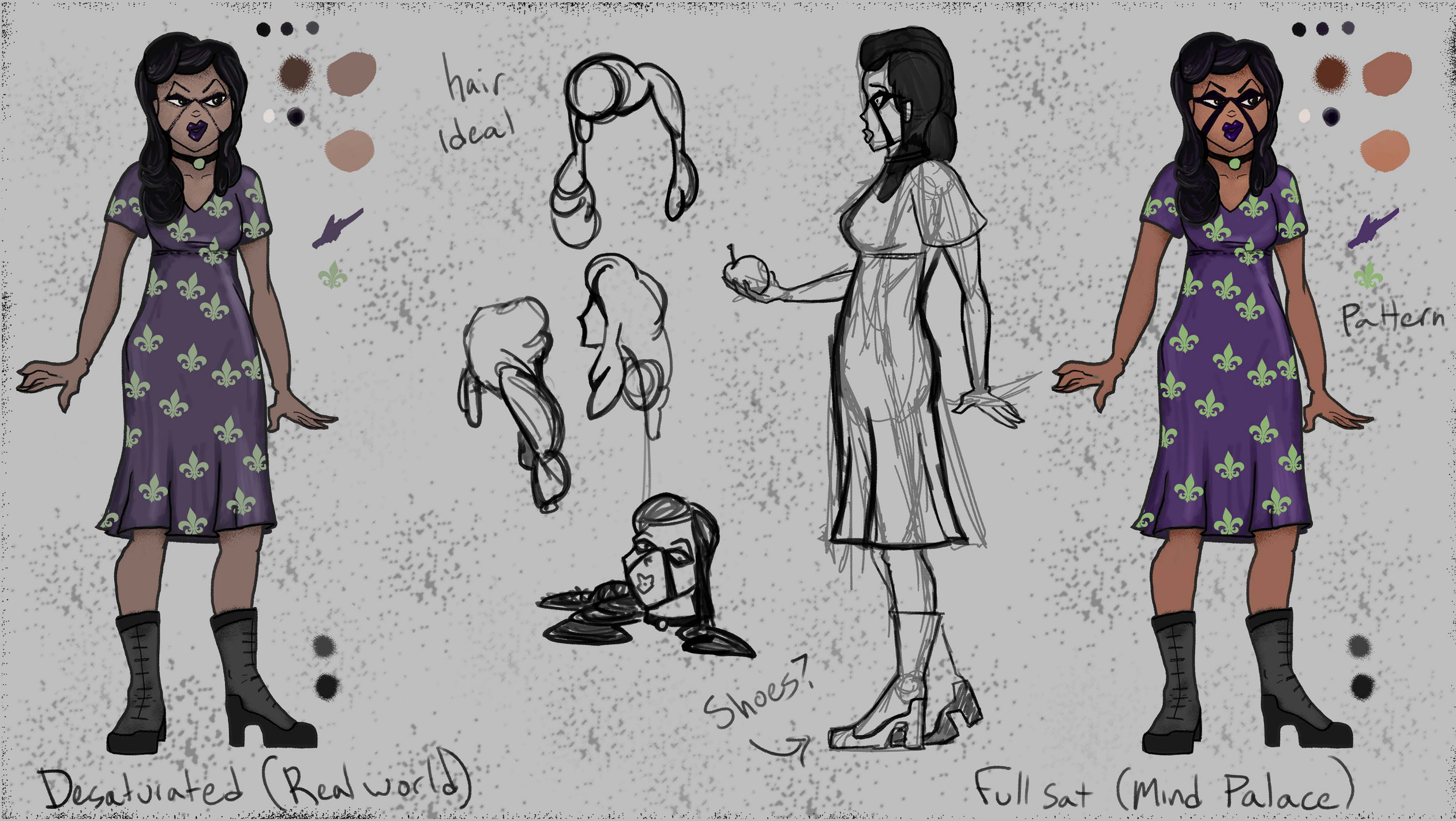
She returns to the moment at hand, back in her mind. Coattails is standing behind her. She realizes that she needs a mind to keep up the body. She needs experiences to continue to think – to be herself.

Coattails smiles. Magdalene's body picks up her head and puts it on her shoulders. She picks up an apple from the shrine in front of her. She smiles at the camera and takes a bite.

Character Design: Coattails



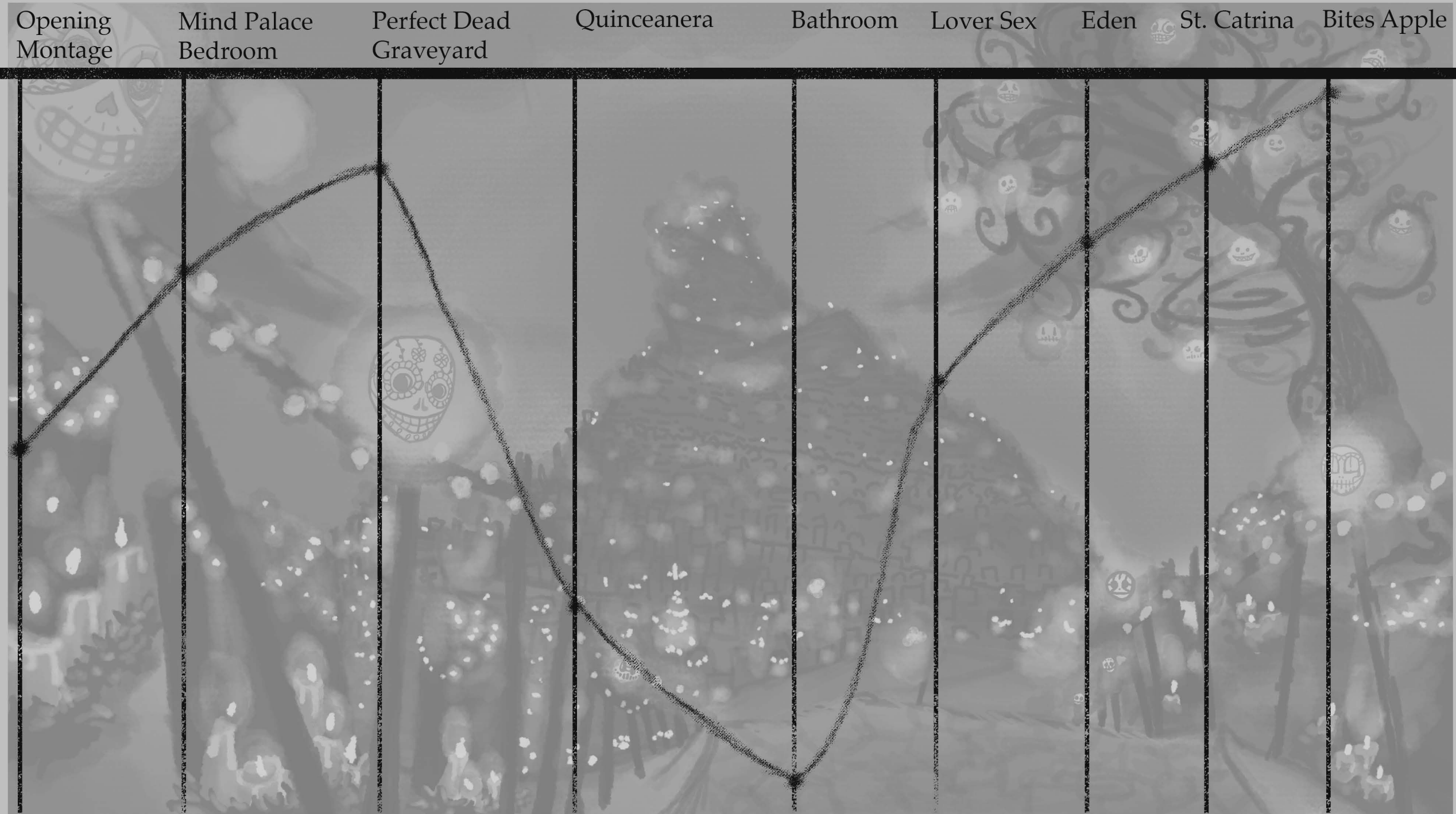
Character Design: Magdalene Color



Coattails and Paradise:
Preproduction Kit
Knhik Haefner, 2016

Story:

Emotion Beat Board



Coattails and Paradise:
Preproduction Kit
Knhik Haefner, 2016

Set Design:

Graveyard Location



Coattails and Paradise:
Preproduction Kit
Knhik Haefner, 2016

Set Design:
Mind Palace V.1



Coattails and Paradise:
Preproduction Kit
Knhik Haefner, 2016

Set Design:
Theater Dream Space I



Coattails and Paradise:
Preproduction Kit
Knhik Haefner, 2016

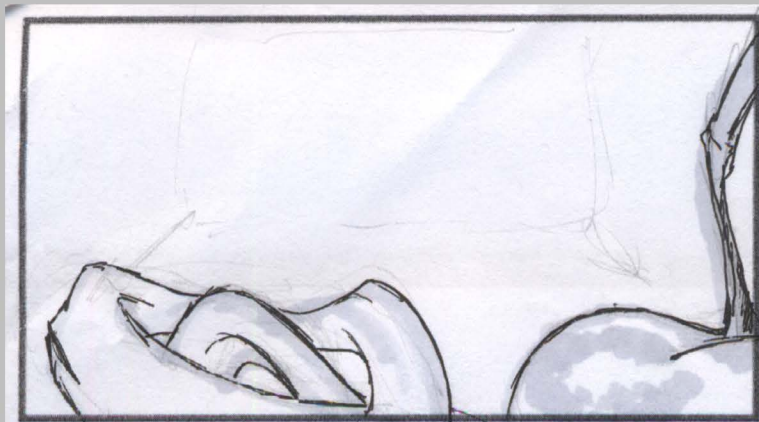
Set Design:
Quinceanera



Set Design:
Bathroom Location



Storyboard:
Page 1



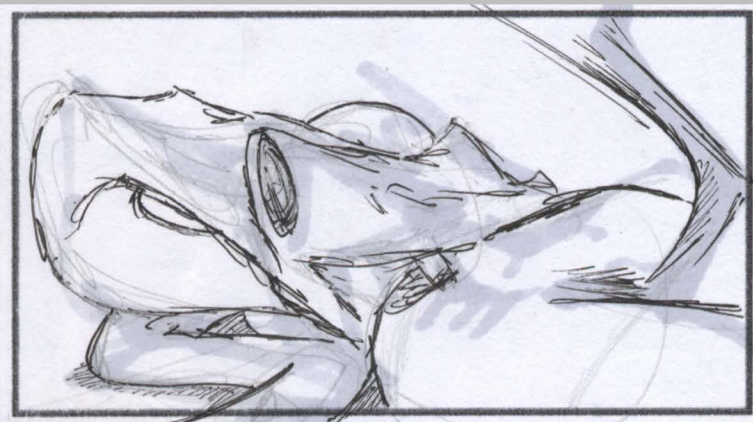
Shot: CU Camera Zoom OUT

Action: A coiling snake and a ripe apple come into frame...
Dialogue:



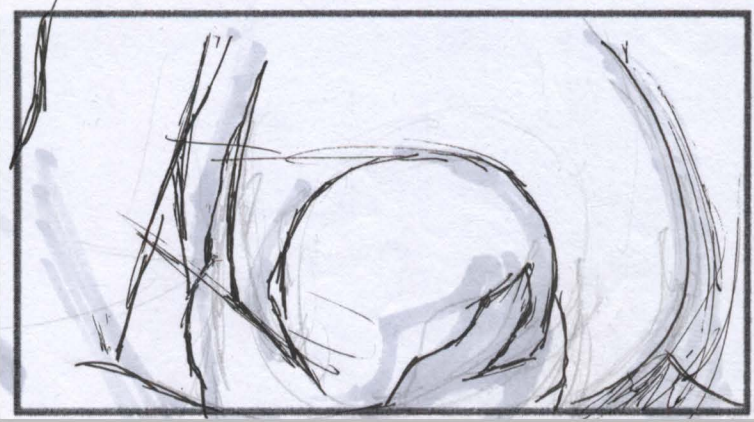
Shot: Continue, CU Zoom OUT

Action: The snake rears back, fangs out...
Dialogue:



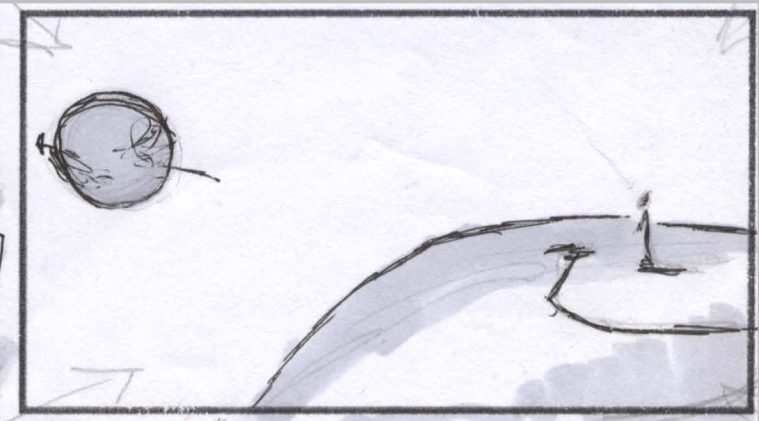
Shot: Cont. Morph

Action: The snake bites into the ripe apple and both begin to morph with the action...
Dialogue:



Shot: CU morph

Action: The snake head rolls to become a small child suckling at the apple, now a breast...
Dialogue:



Shot: LS Morph

Action: The baby's head rolls forward and becomes the moon, the breast rolls back to form the earth
Dialogue:



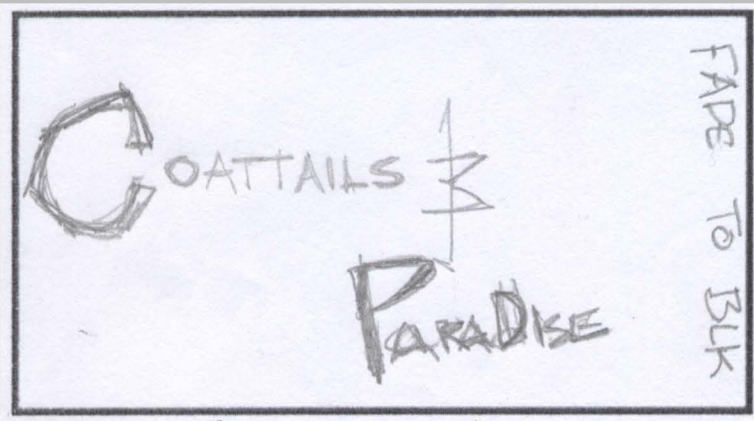
Shot: OTS/ Med

Action: MAGDALENE, on the moon, looks over to COATTAILS, the snake...
Dialogue:



Shot: CU

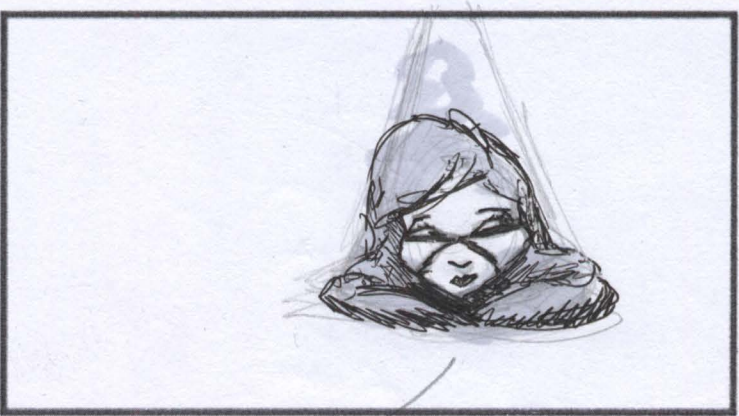
Action: Magdalene looks over to the moon and speaks
Dialogue: M "Well, it wasn't always this good..."



Shot: Title

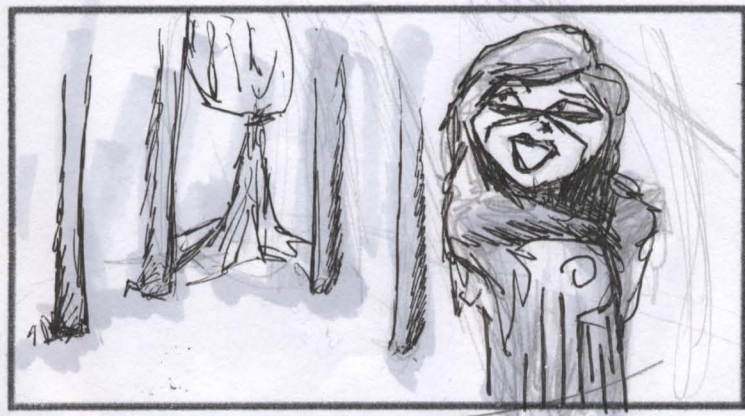
Action: Titel fades in, dances on screen. Fade to BLK
Dialogue:

Storyboard:
Page 2



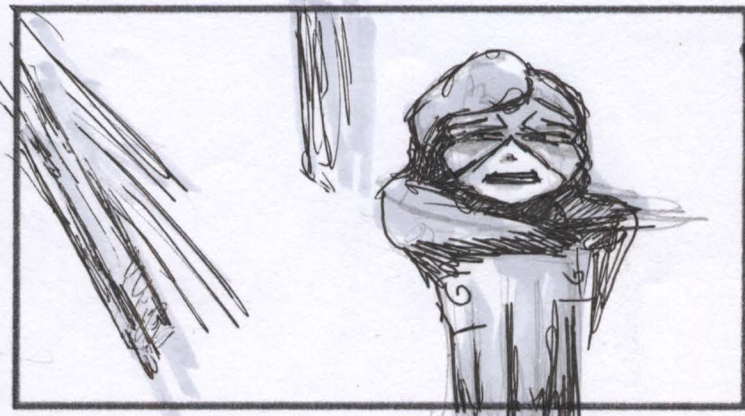
Shot: Med/ CU Spotlight

Action: The lights come up on Magdalene's head.
She smile, happily and speaks
Dialogue: She begins to talk about herself...



Shot: Med/ Long, Zoom Out, rotate, Lights come up

Action: Mag smiles as festive theatrical space comes into view.
Dialogue: She says she feels so at home in her mind free to wander and explore in her thoughts



Shot: Cont. The background set flies up and out

Action: As she talks, there is rythmic thumping and Mag growns, not in pain....
Dialogue: She describes that she feels occasionally disconnected from her body in her mind palace....



Shot: CU The set flies in as a bedroom, with warm intimate lighting...

Action: Mag gasps again suddenly and takes a bored look as the sex thumping continues below her.
Dialogue:



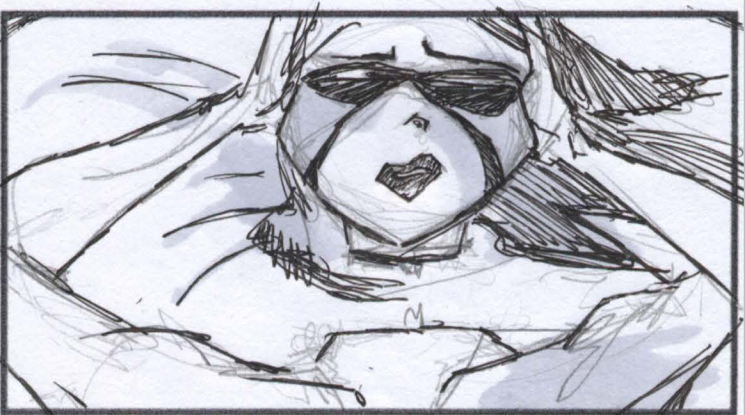
Shot: Cont. CU

Action: Two hands reach up from bottom frame. Mag is bored, the sex pounding continues...
Dialogue: She says that sometimes her mind can be worlds away from the moment...



Shot: Cont. CU Tracking head

Action: The hands lower Mag down from the bookshelf and the sounds slows...
Dialogue: She says her body is surly a part of her but so far from her essensial part....



Shot: Cont. CU

Action: Her hands place her head on her body, in in bed....
Dialogue: That the two of them are hardly in the same place....



Shot: Cont. CU

Action: Mag blinks, and looks around, her head now complete with her shoulders....
Dialogue:

Storyboard:
Page 3



Shot: CU/ POV

Action: Mag's lover on top looks down at her...
Dialogue: He asks if that felt good?



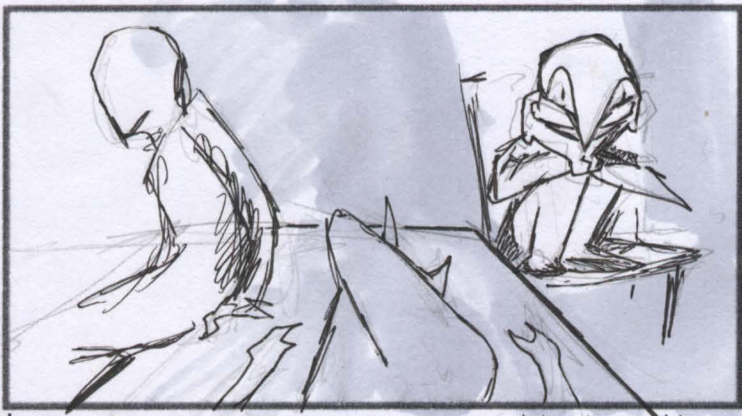
Shot: Cont. CU POV

Action: Mag's hand enters the frame and touches
 he cheek. He smiles.
Dialogue:



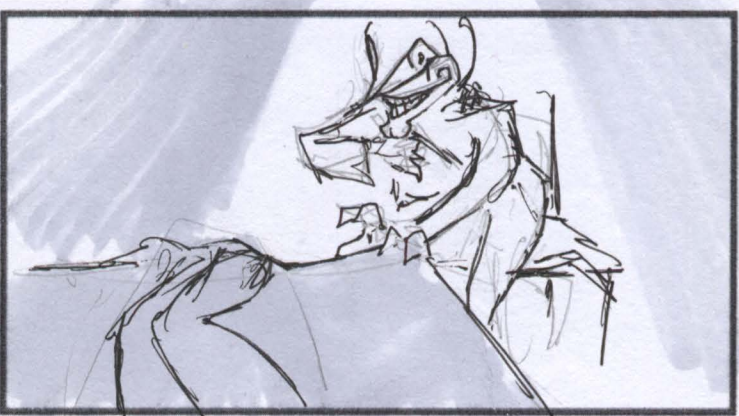
Shot: CU Mag on bed as before,

Action: She smiles sheepishly and says it was fine.
 She looks around.
Dialogue: She lies about how good sex was....



Shot: Mag POV LS

Action: Her lover sits up and out of the frame.
 A light comes on, revealing Coattails is watching
Dialogue: Coattails begins introduction.



Shot: Cont.POV LS

Action: Coattails introduces itself, steps onto the
 bed....
Dialogue: Coattails is asks how long Mag has
 felt this way....



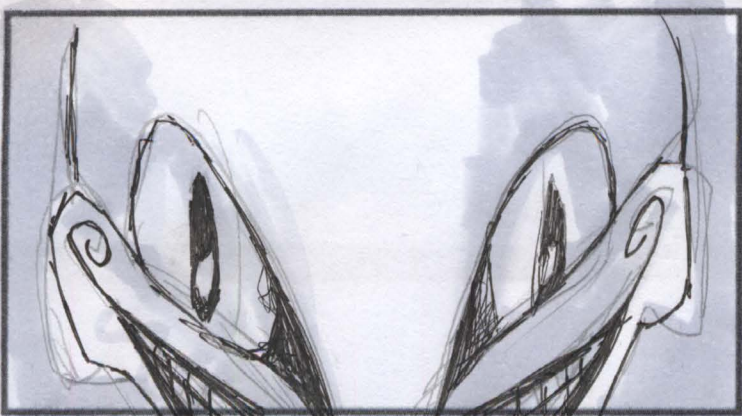
Shot: LS/ Two shot....

Action: Coattails approaches Mag on the bed....
Dialogue: Mag says its always been like this.
 Coattails says these things have beginnings....



Shot: CU Mag as before

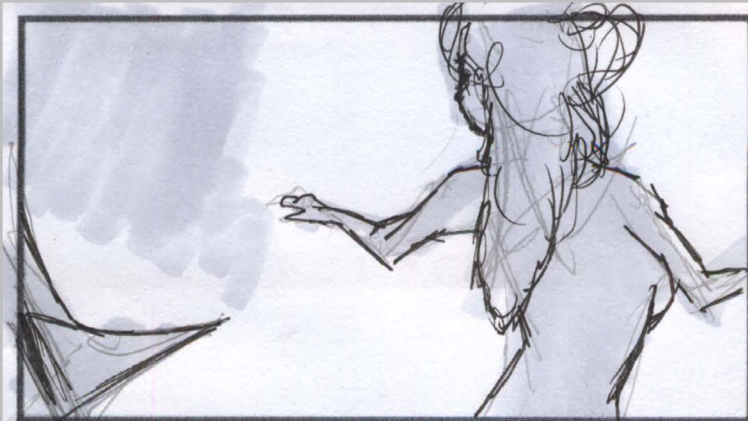
Action: Mag nervously declines....
Dialogue: She says this is part of who she is,
 unsatisfied....



Shot: Reverse, CU/ Mag POV

Action: Coattails leans in, clever and smiling...
Dialogue: CT says these things have solutions as well
 if only she will follow CT along the path.....

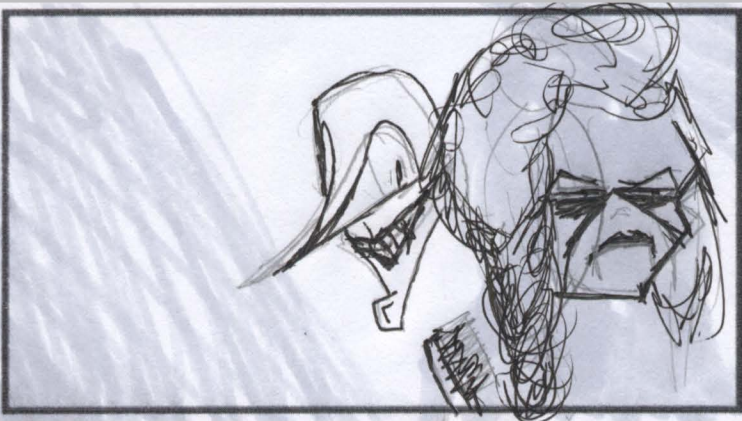
Storyboard:
Page 4



Shot: OTS/ Med

Action: Mag sits up and waves off CT

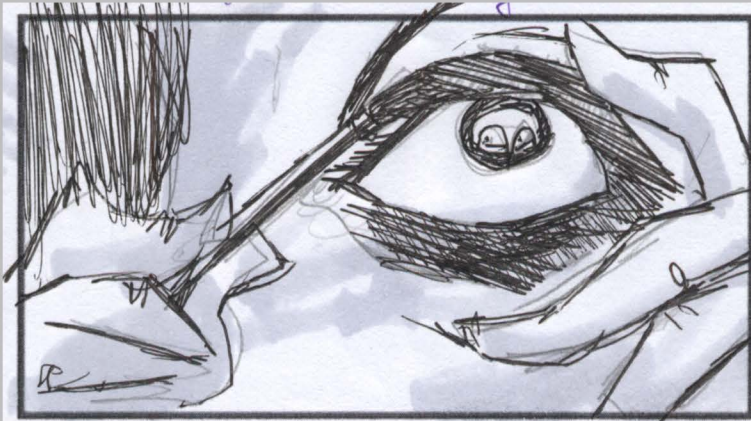
Dialogue: Mag says all she wants is to be more perfect.



Shot: MONTAGE BEGINS CU Mag

Action: Mag brushes her hair, CT leans out from behind.

Dialogue: CT taunts her about how much time it takes to get ready.



Shot: MONTAGE XCU Mag's Eye

Action: Mag puts on eyeliner with CT in the reflection of her eye.

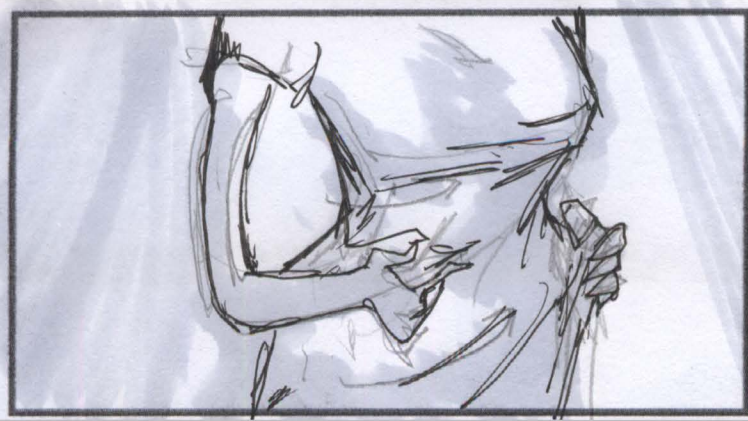
Dialogue: CT taunts about painting her face to match her beautiful mind.



Shot: MONTAGE XCU of Mags hands

Action: Mag paints her nails while CT holds her hand

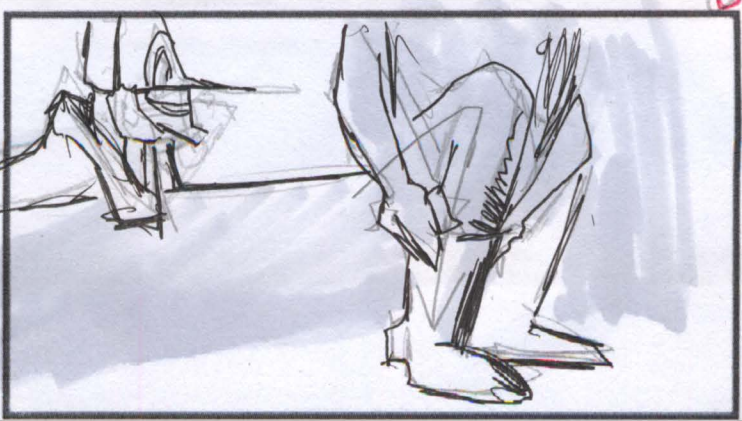
Dialogue: CT taunts about all these little things.



Shot: MONTAGE, Med Mag's body

Action: Mag streightens her dress after putting it on.....

Dialogue: CT taunts about clothing her meat and bones.....



Shot: MONTAGE Med/ 2 shot

Action: Head out of frame, Mag puts on her shoes

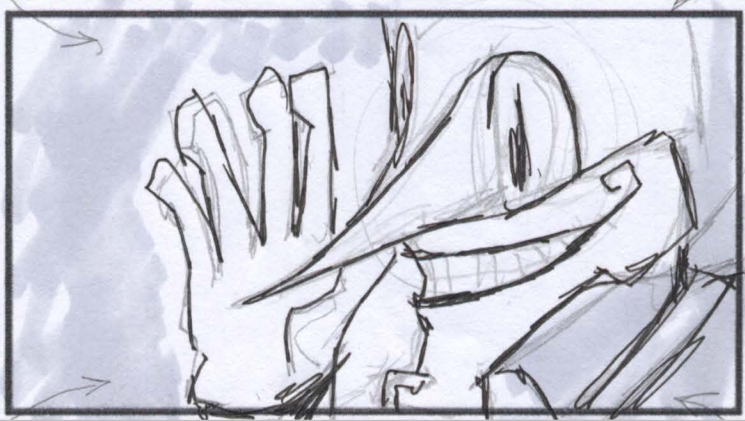
Dialogue: CT taunts about finding where she can go to be more perfect.....



Shot: OTS/ LS CT at the edge of the bedroom

Action: Mag looks up, ready now to go, she relents

Dialogue: Where are we going to find something perfect.....



Shot: Cont. Fast push in to CU of CT

Action: CT smiles wide and hides its mouth as a whisper or secret.

Dialogue: It's not a where, but a when....

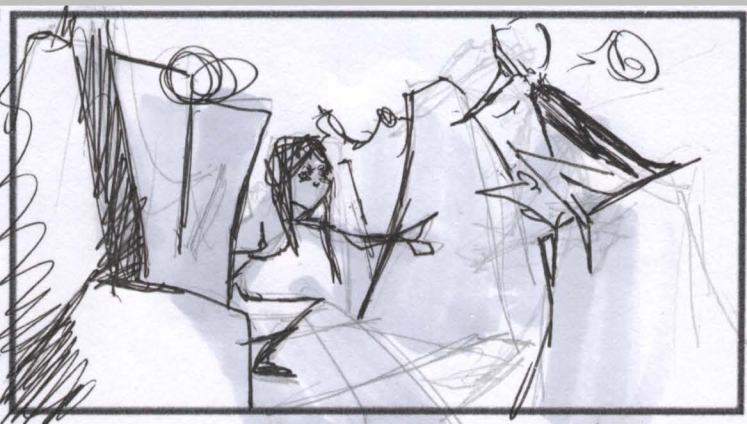
Storyboard:
Page 5



Shot: Cont. POV Push in, past CT.

Action: CT's hand motions out as a magician might

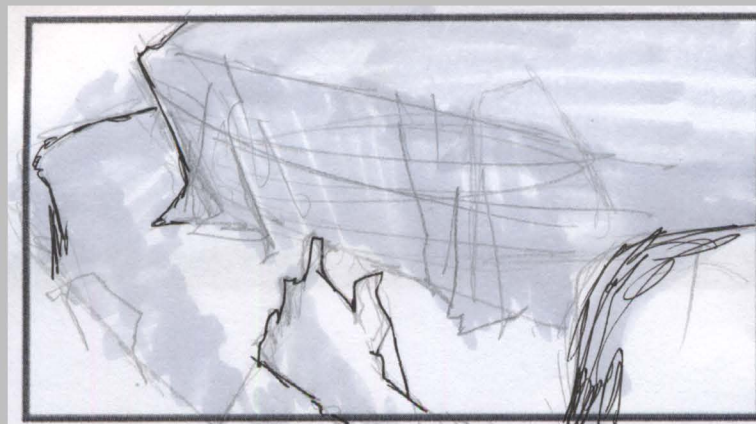
Dialogue: And there is so much to find in the places we've been....



Shot: LS The festival

Action: Mag makes her way through the festive scene, through and past the camera, CT sits.

Dialogue: Mag talks about memory and searching



Shot: OTS/ LS

Action: Mag enters the frame and moves around the spiral edge...

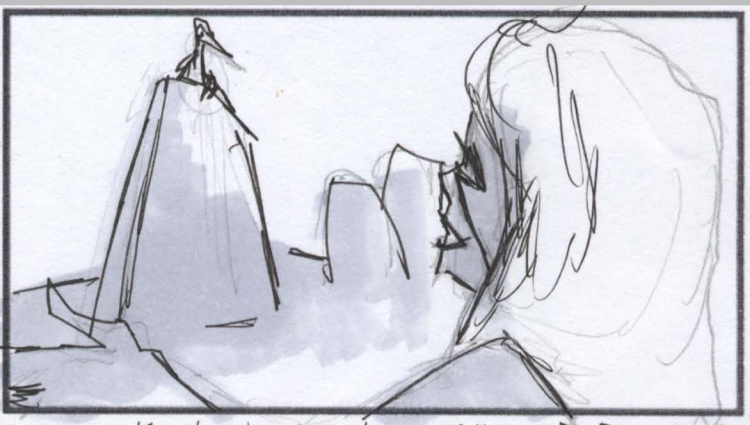
Dialogue:



Shot: Cont. The camera pans up to the top of the stage, a graveyard....

Action: Mag walks up the spiral rim to see CT on the top of a large tombstone.

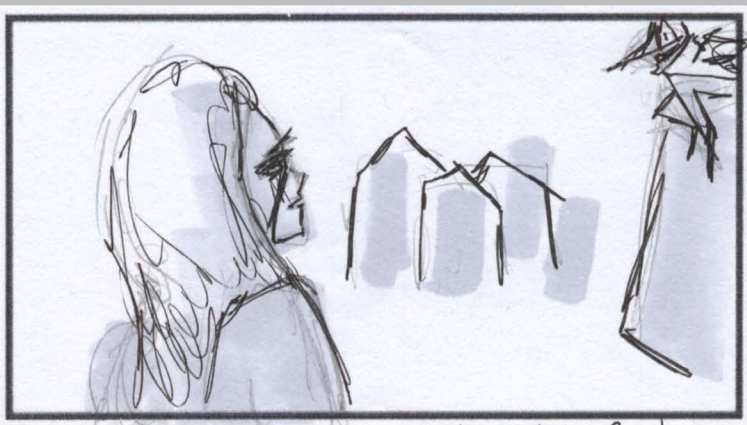
Dialogue: CT says we get a lot of things from remembering those before us.



Shot: OTS/ LS

Action: Mag relates an envy of the dead to CT

Dialogue: She says they are remembered perfectly in death, a unity of mind and body....



Shot: Cont. The camera swings around as CT speaks.

Action: Ct leans in and asks...

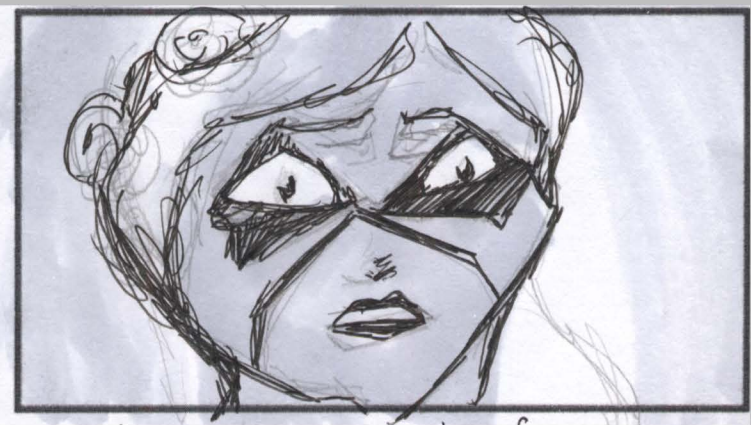
Dialogue: When do you most remember feeling so disjointed from your body?



Shot: Cont. as the stage-like set changes.

Action: Mag recoils as the graves rise and the lighting changes. The graveyard becomes a prom/ dance

Dialogue:

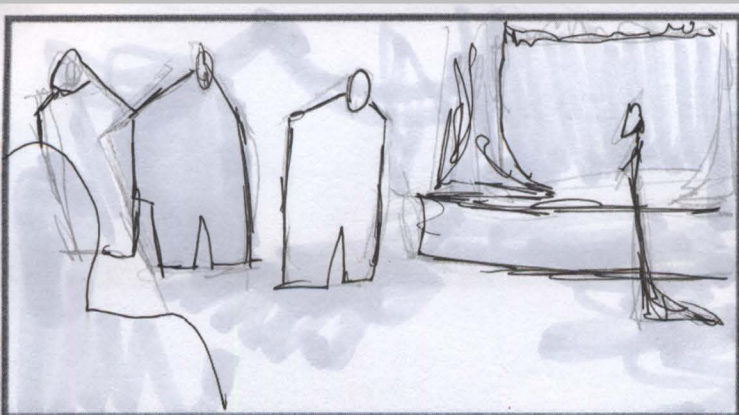


Shot: CU Mag reaction

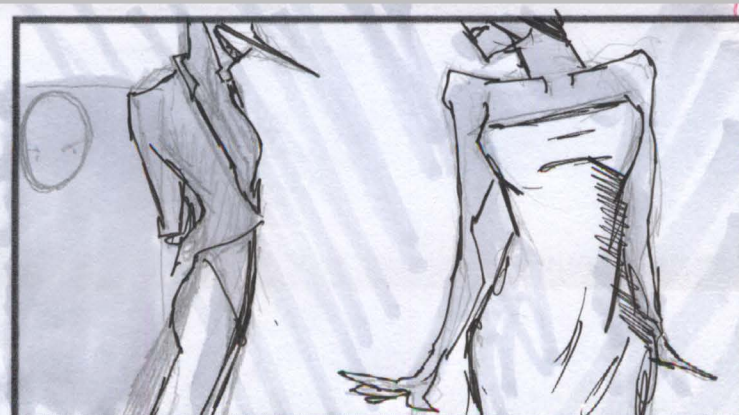
Action: Her hair is festive for the Quincenera, she looks up in the moment from the past.

Dialogue: At my quincenera....

Storyboard:
Page 6



Shot: LS. The quincenera scene, with boys and girls awkwardly standing about
Action: They move and glide like stage props.
Dialogue: M: ...was when I looked at all these children playing dressup. Boys their father's suits like linebackers...



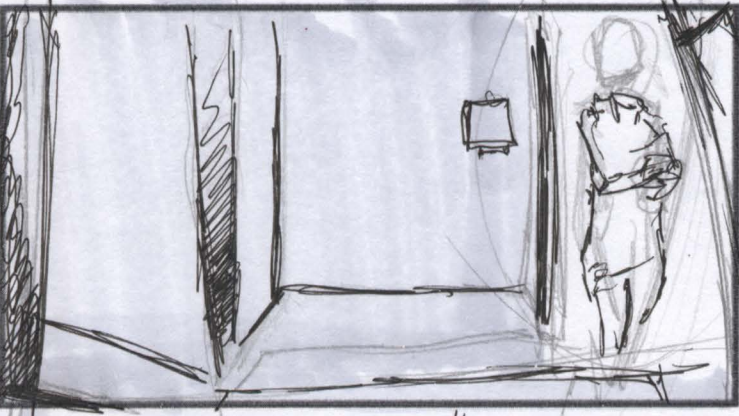
Shot: Med shot. CT and Mag are cut off at the eyes.
Action: Bodies on display as Mag is awkward...
Dialogue: Girls dressed like they were already so grown up... This was a moment I felt like...



Shot: Cont.
Action: Mag moves her hands around her dress while she talks....
Dialogue: ...I felt like I had to look so pretty. A perfect self at a Saturday party....



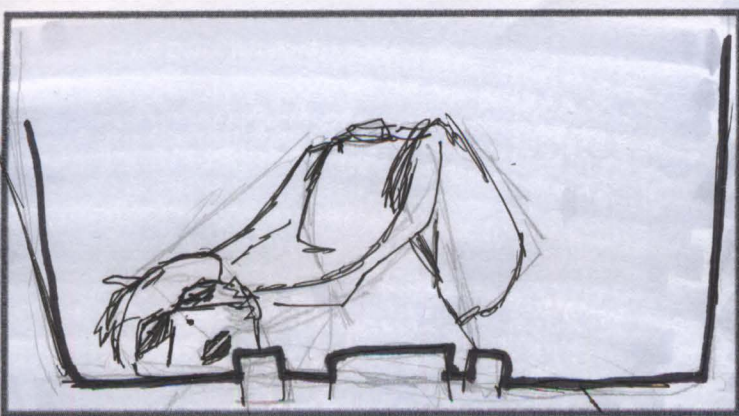
Shot: Cont. The camera pans up to Mags face. Light splits the shot as she talks.
Action: Mag sadly keeps talking....
Dialogue: I felt like it was so much work....



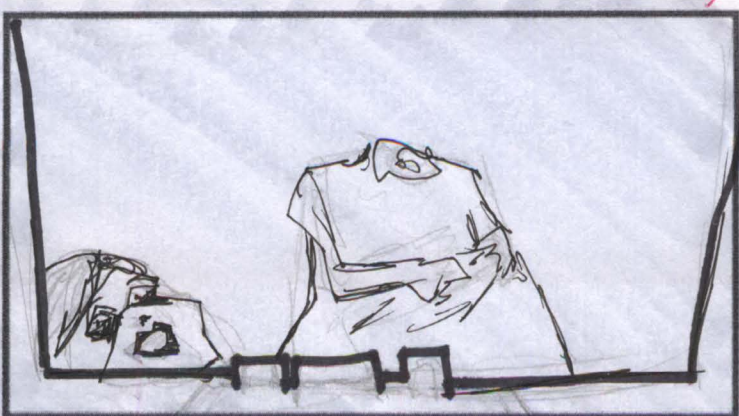
Shot: LS. Bathroom. The light flares to white and the scene changes. The camera locks down.
Action: Mag busts into the bathroom., head in one one hand, bag in the other....
Dialogue:



Shot: Cont.
Action: Mag takes her head in her hands...
Dialogue:

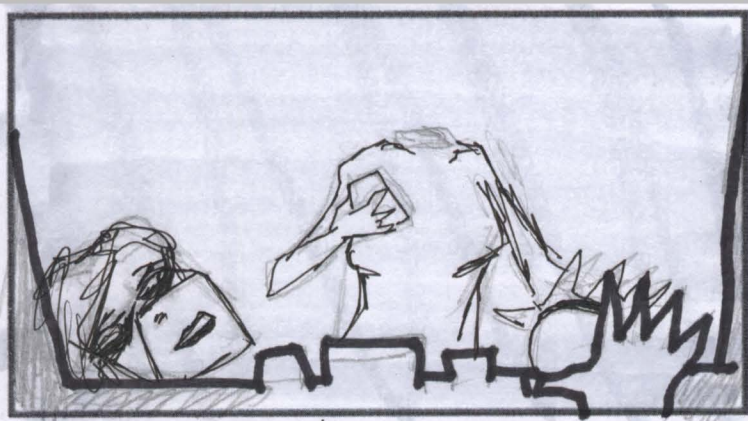


Shot: Cont.
Action: Mag sets her head down on the counter of the sink.
Dialogue: M: The me on a wednesday morning is a series of chores....



Shot: Cont.
Action: Mag's body reaches into her bag as her head talks...
Dialogue: Something to be upkept.

Storyboard:
Page 7



Shot: Cont.

Action: Her body takes an apple and makeup kit out of her bag.

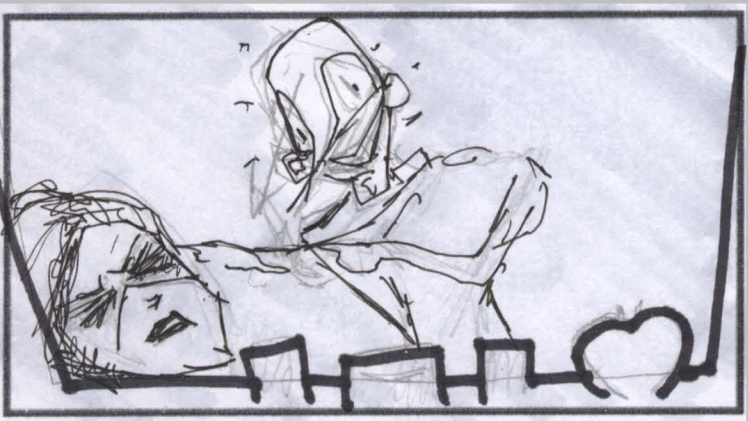
Dialogue: It's hard to believe its the same thing from that Saturday night, sometimes....



Shot: Cont.

Action: Her body opens and preps the makeup

Dialogue: It just takes so much work....



Shot: Cont.

Action: As her body reaches for her head, CT pops up behind her

Dialogue: CT "But surely those chores are worth the work occasionally!"



Shot: The frame breaks up as CT morphs...

Action: CT rapidly shifts into a snake and coils around Mag's arm...

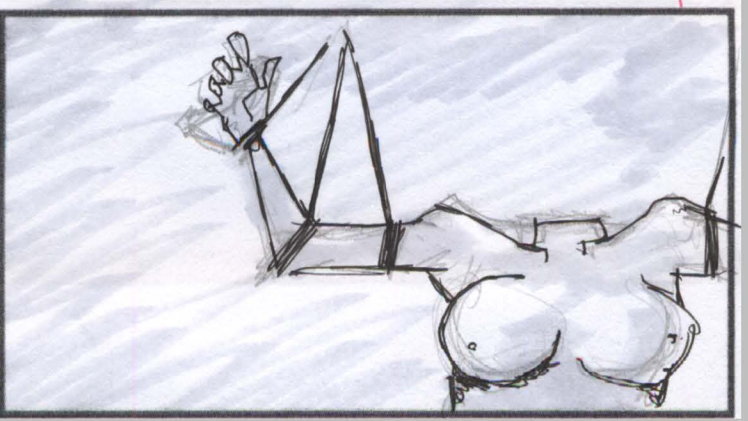
Dialogue:



Shot: The camera begins to push in while CT coils.

Action: Mag's head falls out of screen and CT continues to morph...

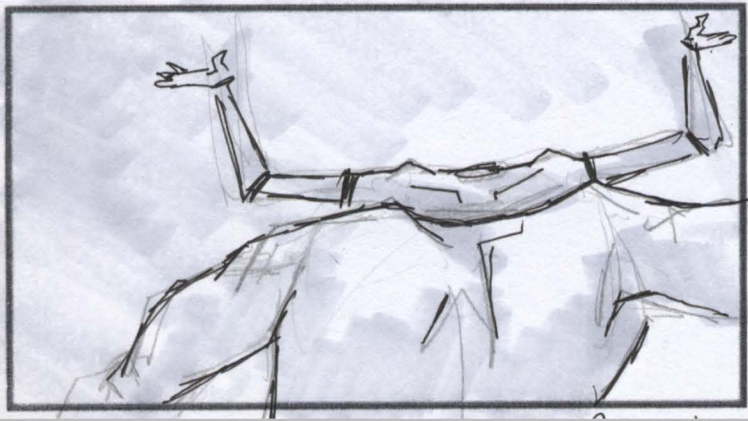
Dialogue:



Shot: The scene chagnes behind the body and pops back into a bedroom...

Action: Mag's body is center as it convulses....

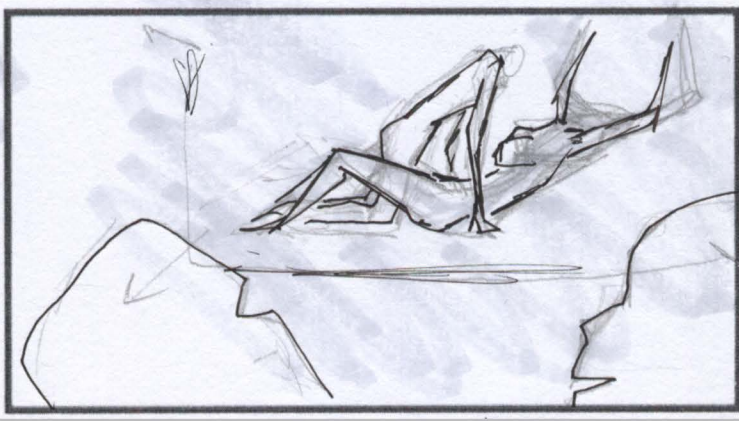
Dialogue:



Shot: The camera pulls back

Action: A headless male body enters the frame, thrusting fast....

Dialogue:

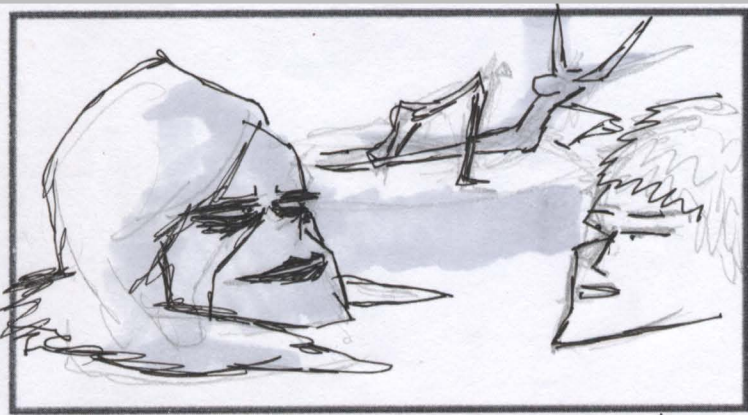


Shot: LS of the bodies during sex. The camera pulls back to see sillhouetts....

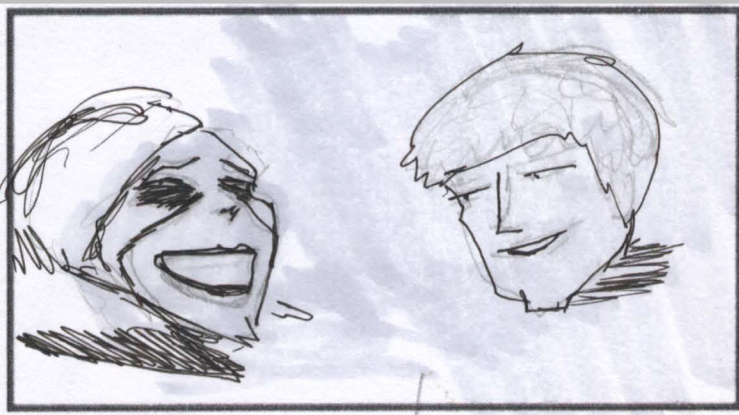
Action: They are really going hard while the shapes in the foreground begin to laugh...

Dialogue: Laughter....

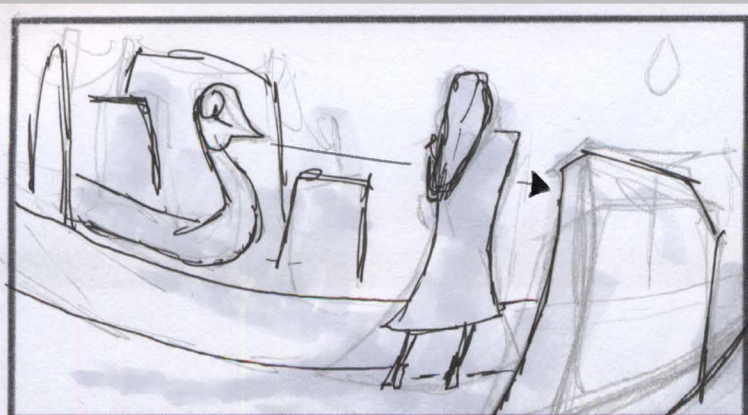
Storyboard:
Page 8



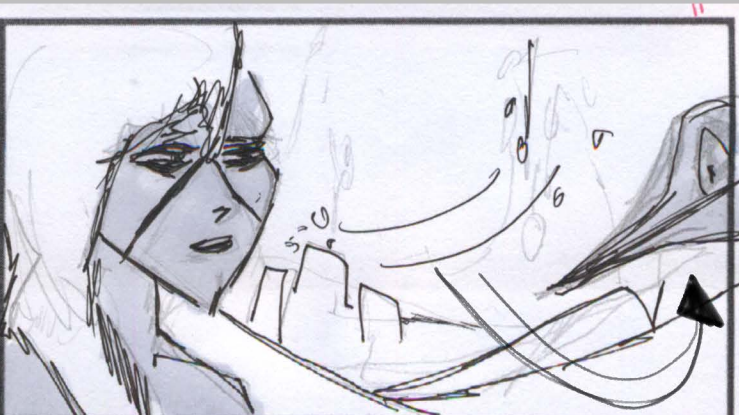
Shot: Cont. The camera stops to see two heads on the floor come into frame.
Action: The stare into each other's eyes as the bodies have sex in the background....
Dialogue: Mag says sometimes her body affords her a moment to share, even if the circumstances were physical...



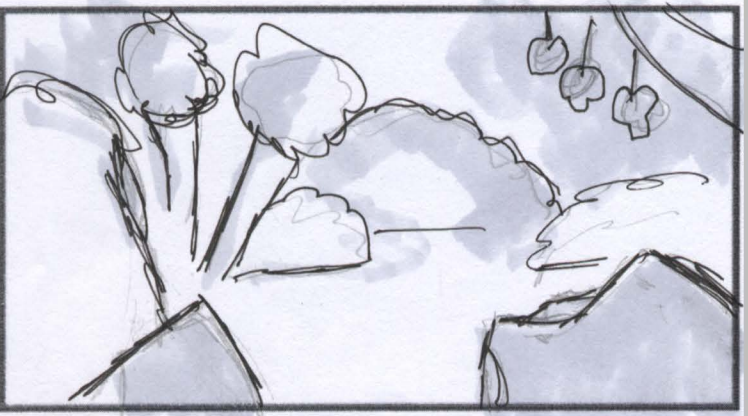
Shot: Cont. The camera pans down after to black.
Action: Both laugh as the bodies fade from behind.
Dialogue:



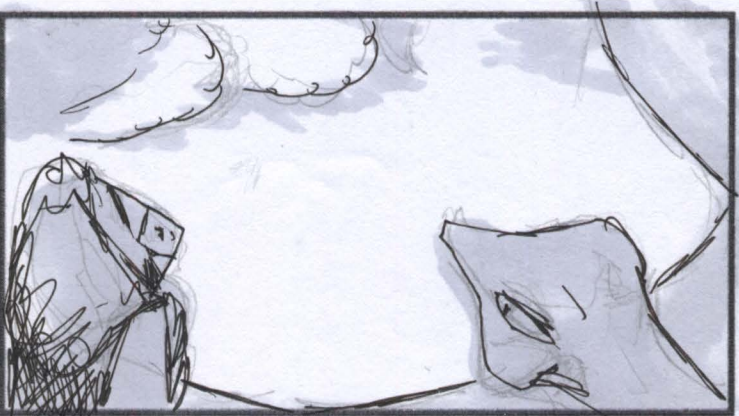
Shot: The camera pans down and returns to the festivel scene.
Action: The massive form of CT coils around the space. Mag stands alone....
Dialogue: CT says she could choose... surely there could be a place where she wouldn't feel so inadiquite....



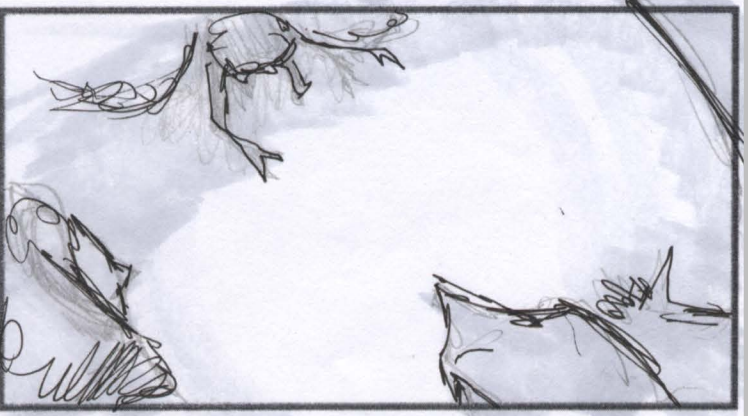
Shot: CU Mag looks over at CT, who turns to face her.
Action: CT coils around a looks into Mags eyes.
Dialogue: Could there be a place where she wouldnt know better than to be wild and hungry and free of her mind?



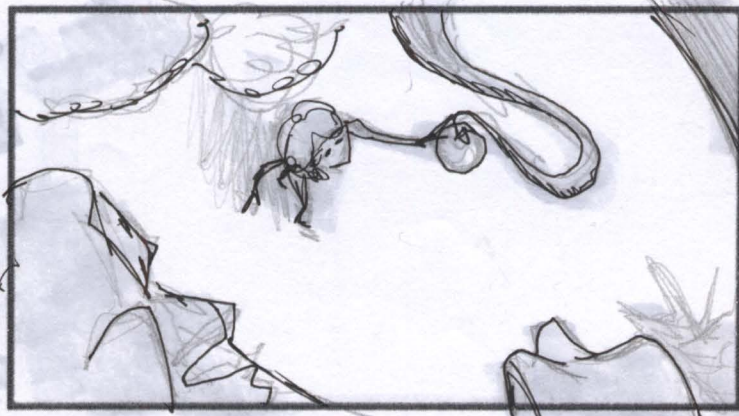
Shot: Cont. The scene shifts like a play as the festival flies out and the garden flies in.
Action: Both watch as the overgrowth takes over the space...
Dialogue:



Shot: Cont. OTS/ LS
Action: Mag looks to CT while the garden is below
Dialogue: CT "Surely there is someting perfect and savage here?



Shot: Cont OTS LS
Action: A nude woman parts the bushes and enters the clearing...
Dialogue:



Shot: Cont OTS LS
Action: As she approaches the tree, CT lowers an apple suspended by the snake tail...
Dialogue:

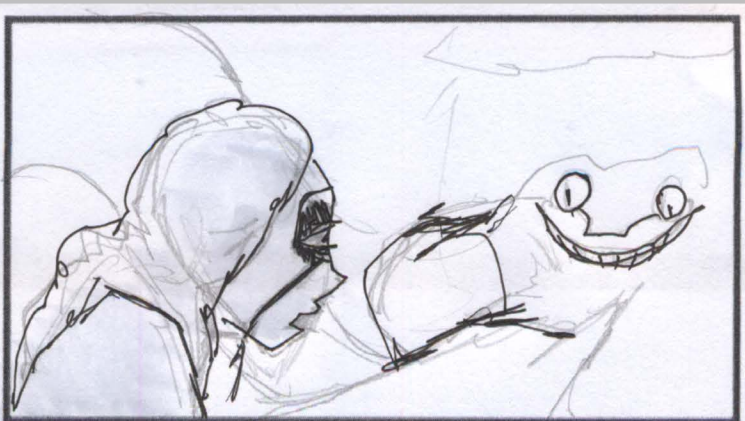
Storyboard:
Page 9



Shot: Reverse shot. CU/ LS garden.

Action: Eve reaches out for the apple while CT coils around Mag as they watch....

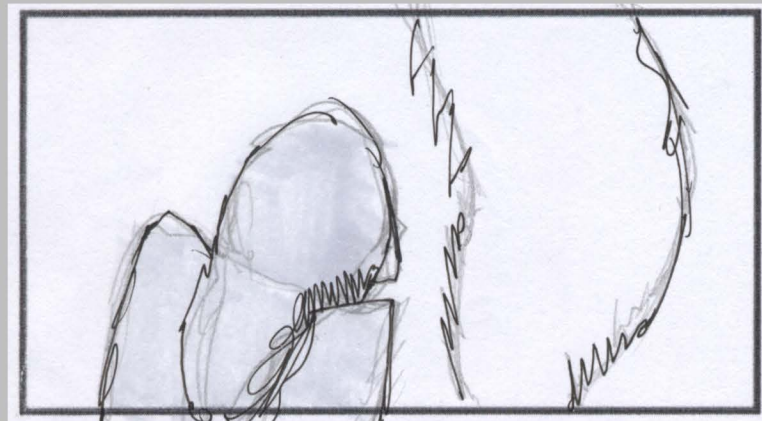
Dialogue: CT Is this what you would want? A kind of freedom is a kind of harmony....



Shot: OTS Med 2 shot at the top of the tree.

Action: Coattails smiles as Mag replies.

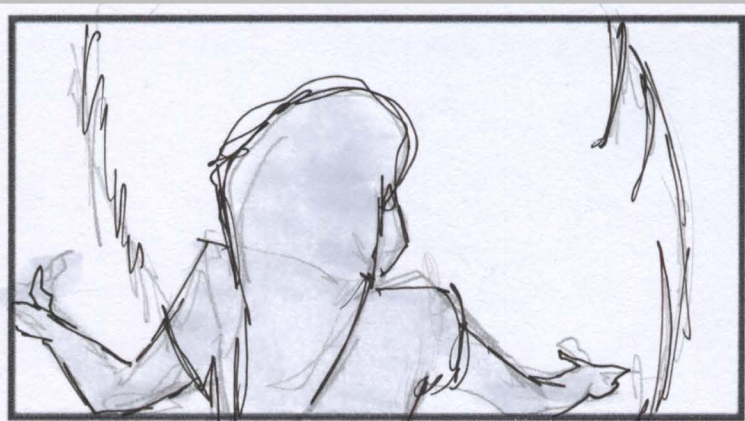
Dialogue: M: I am trying to be more perfect, but my mind is who I am. I could never be without what makes me the most me....



Shot: Cont. The garden desolves while the lights change.

Action: Mag shrinks back as the jaws of the snake swallow the entire frame....

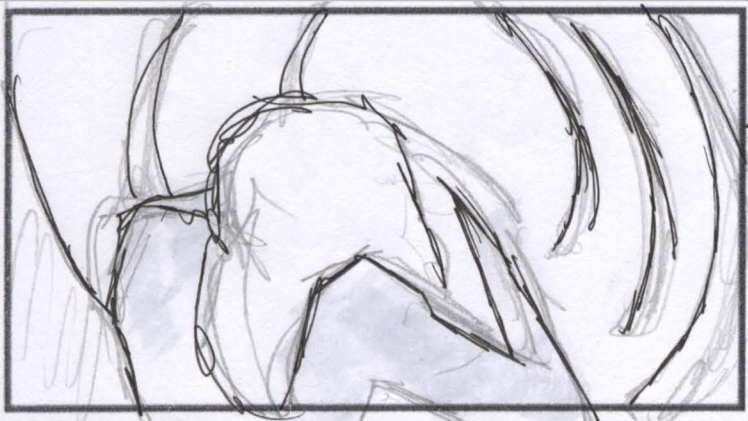
Dialogue:



Shot: Cont. The scene turns red.

Action: CT envelopes all with its large fangs. Mag is unhurt...

Dialogue:



Shot: Cont. OTS The ribs inside the snake grow and change.

Action: Mag covers her face while the snake insides begin to moroh...

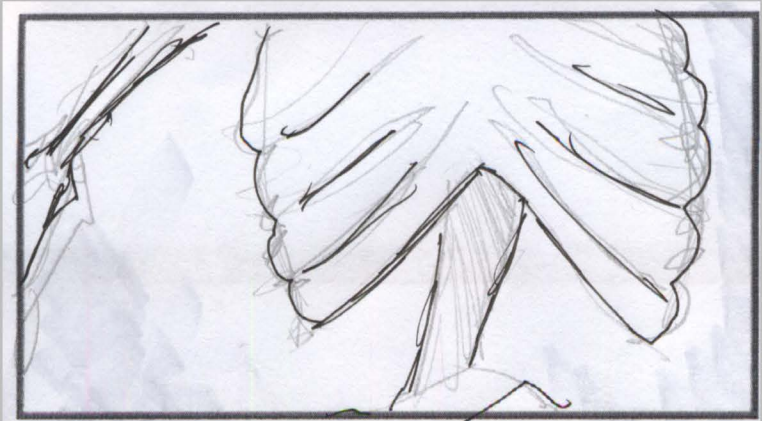
Dialogue:



Shot: Cont. OTS/ LS the ribcage forms.

Action: Mag looks up a falls off the screen...

Dialogue:



Shot: Cont CU CT's body. The camera pans up.

Action:

Dialogue:

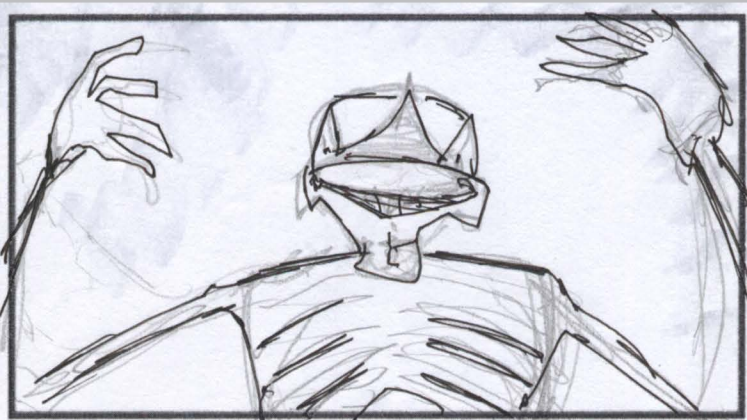


Shot: Cont CU of CT

Action: CT smiles and looks to the camera.

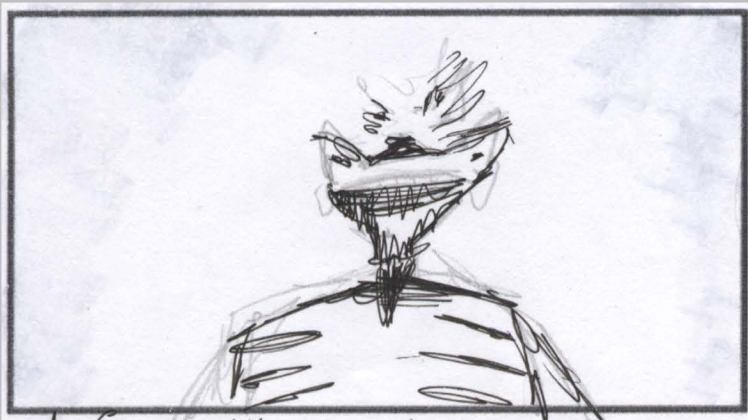
Dialogue: Is this what you want to be rid of?

Storyboard:
Page 10



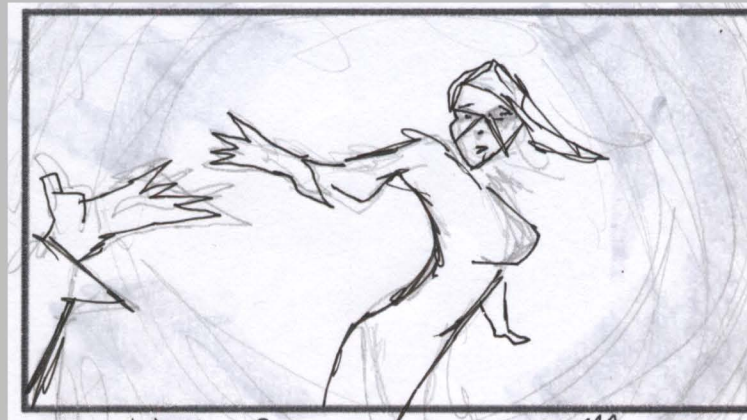
Shot: Cont. CU of CT

Action: CT Smiles and gestures while it talks.
Dialogue: Free of bones that age and flesh that sags.
Organs that fail. Wouldn't you rather be just a mind?



Shot: Cont. CU of CT

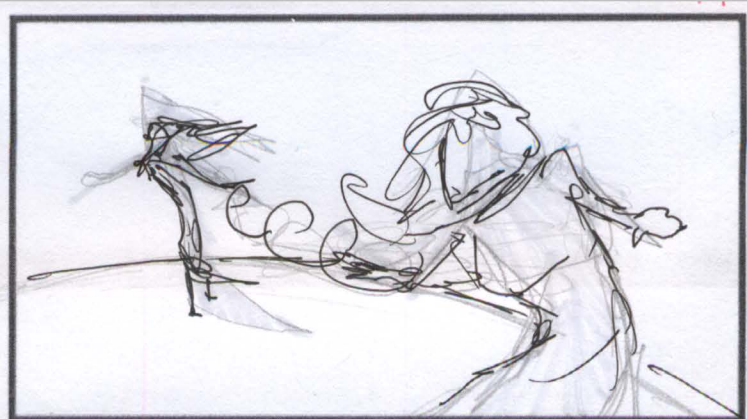
Action: A light breaks open and a silhouette springs out of CT's forehead.
Dialogue:



Shot: Cont. LS Mag runs to camera while CT fades from the background.
Action: As she rushes forward she reaches out and grabs a hand extended...
Dialogue:



Shot: Cont. Med
Action: CT catches her and spins her as a ballroom dance...
Dialogue:



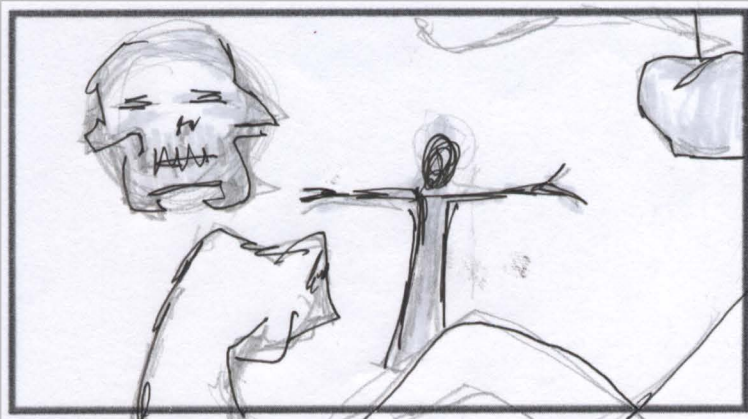
Shot: Cont. LS on the moon.
Action: Mag spins out from the dance and faces the darkness
Dialogue:



Shot: Med on the moon.
Action: Mag catches herself, standing stable...
Dialogue:



Shot: CU of Mag.
Action: Her eyes go wide in realization.
Dialogue: This is where we started....



Shot: OTS LS, A skull and apple hand in the air
Mag stands before them on the moon.
Action: CT coils around the foreground.
Dialogue: Is this the choice? The solution? Would you keep a body or a mind if you can't have harmony? Shed one and be perfect.

Storyboard: Page 11



Shot: Med. Mag alone

Action: Mag shrugs and smiles over her shoulder at CT.

Dialogue: "I guess I'm not trying to shed my skin, snake...."



Shot: Rack focus as the camera changes to the Quincenera shot from before...

Action: Mag is standing uncomfortable in her dress

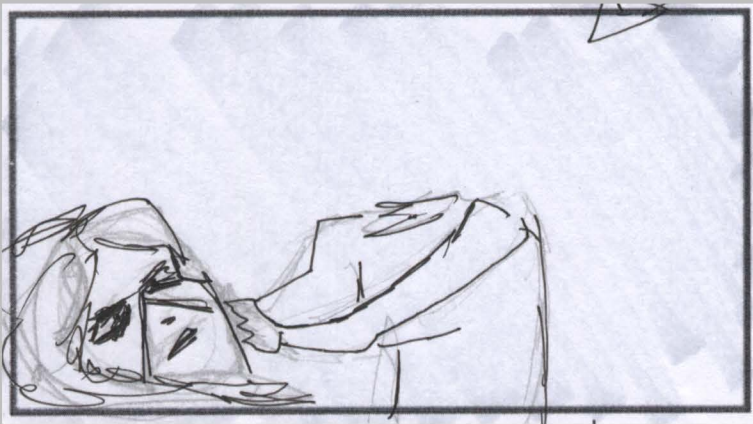
Dialogue: Without knowing how frustrating it was to look good, I would never have learned...



Shot: Lighting chagnes as the scene becomes the Bathroom again.

Action: Mag pulls her head off while the sink flies in

Dialogue:



Shot: LS. As before.

Action: Her body puts down her head a reaches back to her bag.

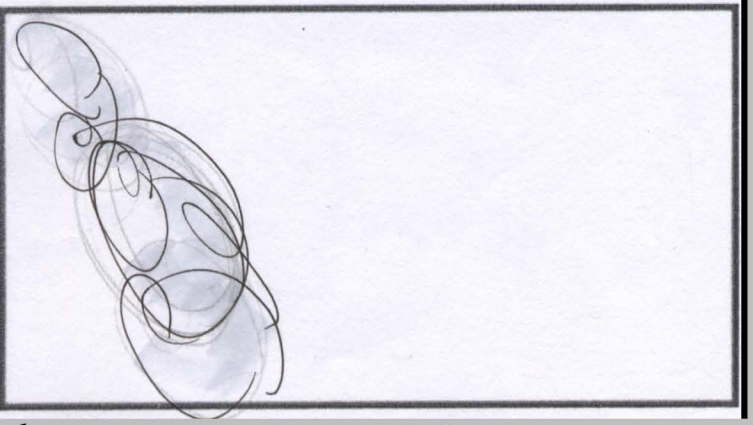
Dialogue: how costly those chores of my body are.



Shot: Cont.

Action: Her body open a tampon

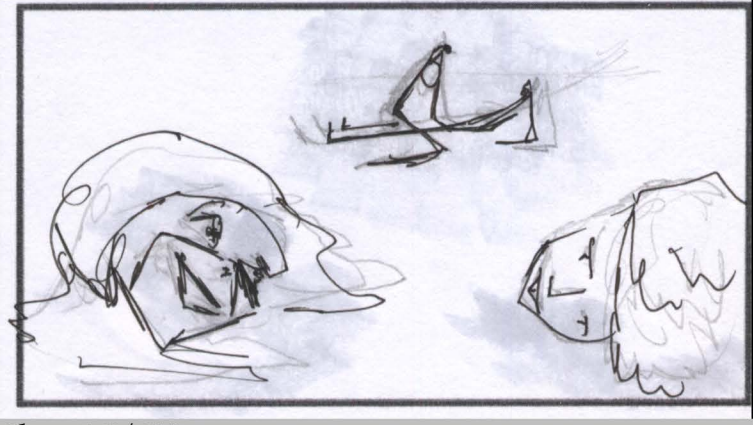
Dialogue:



Shot: camera pans down to darkness

Action: Her head bounces on the floor and lands...

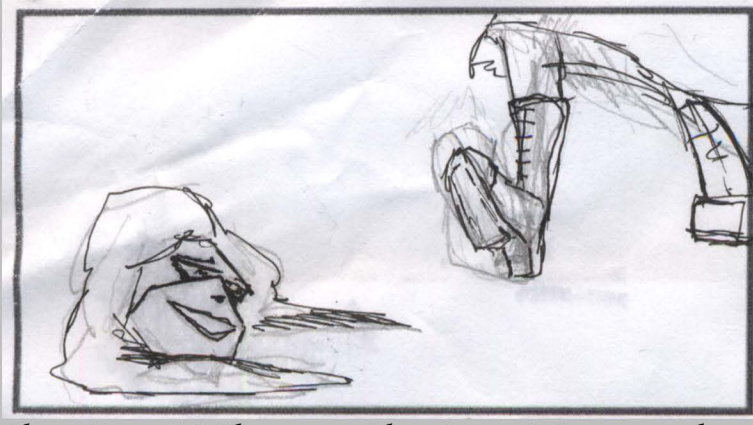
Dialogue:



Shot: LS/CU

Action: ... in the bedroom. The bodies are still at it, with her on top now. They look at each other.

Dialogue: Without those experiences, I never would have had the chance to connect like this...



Shot: Cont. LS The set and her lover fade out as she returns to the festival, head on the floor.

Action: Her feet walk over.

Dialogue: I might be seperate from my body at times....

Storyboard:
Page 12



Shot: Cont.

Action: Her hands extend, nurturingly
Dialogue: but I need its experiences to inform
who I am.



Shot: Cont. Track up to her shoulders.

Action: Mag reattaches her head. Apple appears
in pan up.
Dialogue: And I need my mind to keep track of
all its bits and ends.



Shot: Cont. Med

Action: Mag pulls the apple off the tree...
Dialogue: I need my mind and my body to be
who I am today.



Shot: Cont..

Action: Mag takes a bite of the apple and smiles
at the camera.
Dialogue:



Shot: Cut to credits.

Action:
Dialogue: